



Korin-Thar World Atlas

Kielan Yarrow
&
Danny Fitt

Interior artwork:

Danny Fitt

Cover design:

Andy Hopp

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1. General History and Background

The Korin-Thar WORLD ATLAS is primarily a source book for GMs and players, giving background information regarding the dominant civilisations of Korin-Thar in the 34th century ER (Elven Reckoning), the Sixth Age. Each major kingdom, empire or people is detailed in turn, concluding with a discussion of the cultures of those races which do not possess a specific geographical enclave, but rather exist in a scattered or tribal state. This first section provides some general background information regarding the history of Korin-Thar, as well as a broad geographical overview and a discussion of matters relating to religion and magic. GMs and players should remember that the history presented here may differ from the commonly accepted legends regarding antiquity and the birth of the races that a given culture espouses. In particular, the religious beliefs of a PC will tend to determine their view of creation and the origins of life, while views of history will differ radically, from the oral and mythical tales of tribal cultures, to the studied historiography of advanced agrarian societies.

The following extracts summarising the passage of years from earliest times to the present are taken from the introductory chapter of Gren Cethels' great and somewhat controversial work, "A history of Korin-Thar: past, present and future." (commissioned by the High-Elven King Abunsar VII, ER 3255).

"It is customary, when beginning a work of substance, to excuse in advance those shortcomings and peculiarities that might otherwise irritate and bemuse the prospective audience. I therefore begin with an apology (for which I apologise). I am indebted to a host of earlier writers, men of persistence and diligence willing to record in minute detail the genealogies and happenings upon which I have relied, but I cannot explicitly acknowledge them, for in the main their names and backgrounds are lost to the ravages of time. Only one will I mention by name, for without his particular legacy, accumulated with considerable difficulty in recent years, I would be largely at a loss regarding events preceding the establishment of the Elven calendar. He is of course that most mysterious and controversial of scholars, Ferendis, the walker of unknown ways. It was the uncovering of his third and most complete cache of historical law near modern Doranach that inspired my beloved patron, that most wise and just king of the Elves Abunsar VII, to commission this work. I have accumulated an enormous amount of documentation and offer a personal interpretation that is wide in scope and therefore necessarily lacking in detail. Had I the patience of the scribes upon whose labours I have relied, this work would be incomparably greater in scope and imagination. That said, it would also be incomparably less digestible, so I trust that the reader will come to forgive my brevity. I recognise that this is a poor offering by way of an introduction, but I am an impatient and impetuous man by nature and needs must plunge on to make an ill-considered beginning at the beginning.

Or rather as near to the beginning as the lamp of history will cast light. The mists of time part some five millennia ago to reveal an advanced and cultured people, an elder race known to us primarily through the few artefacts they have left. Ferendis has provided us with the key to their archaic script, left carved upon a few resilient stones, and revealed them to have possessed arcane powers beyond the reckoning of modern men. They were true masters of the raw magic, which entered this mortal plane through a radiant pool near their ancient capital of Golbeamothe (Ferendis hints that he may have uncovered the location of this archaeological treasure, but sadly the extant works do not reveal it). We have little of their history, but know that they lit the dark corners of the world with the light of their magic, constructing waterways from the original pool and building six more great cities, each centred about a pool flooded from that mighty original source. Their civilisation flourished, subduing all the soulless denizens of Korin-Thar to the elder's will, but finally calamity befell these ancients. Whether by accident, through pride or by some great magical design gone awry, the capital was swallowed beneath the earth, the mother pool forever extinguished. Its heart cut out, this great civilisation collapsed into bloody civil war...

...Finally, those that remained sought assistance from planes of existence beyond their knowledge. One by one the six pools were tainted and became portals to dimensions unimaginable to mortal minds. The last sources of raw magic became arid and dry, but what remained of that chaotic stuff hung thickest in the air about these pools become portals. In a conflagration of raw magic, the biological energy of our mortal plane and the strange influence of foreign dimensions, the younger races were born. Four tribes came forth from four of the pools, each suffused with other-dimensional intent; their hunger soon begot war with those remaining of the elder race. These were the Dream Years, as the tribes multiplied and spread forth, always warring with the land's old overlords.

Of the four tribes, one was to become the forefathers of the Elves, one to beget the Dwarves, Halflings and Gnomes (originally, if only briefly, of a single stock), one to spawn the cruel Wolves and one to become those monstrous races we call Orcs, Ogres and Trolls. A final, fifth tribe emerged at the centre of the old world, where the energies of all six portal pools mixed about the ruins of the capital: thus human kind entered the world. The birth of races came near to exhausting forever the raw magic, but some remained in the world then and indeed some may still remain today. It was Ferendis' belief that the creation of a new race always relies upon and consumes the raw magic. Certainly, strange races have sprung up since that great second birthing, probably through the meeting of iron will and raw magical chaos.

Now it appears that the elder race still held two pools in the immediate aftermath of this great birthing, from whence no new races sprang. Those that remained



in the orbit of these portals were influenced from the planes beyond. The elders living about one pool formed a pacifist party and elected to give up their dominion, to infiltrate and live amongst the newcomers in a secretive peace. These were the change lords, labelled Changelings in common parlance. Ferendis for his part paints them as goodly in intent, although one cannot help but imagine their eventual purpose to have been a slow re-conquest from within. Their kinsmen who lingered by the final pool were filled with a longing for destruction, electing to forsake their powers of shapeshifting in favour of might in war. They became the dragon lords of old, whose war with the younger races occupied all too many of the Dream Years. It was during these years that The Elven Reckoning began and many great deeds were done as the young races established their place in the world...

...As the races became more truly ensnared in the cycle of mortal existence, their links with the strange dimensions that had given them form weakened and their original purpose was lost. I speak here not in metaphysical riddles, but purely as a historian reflecting upon a general trend in world events. No longer, it seems, were the peoples of each tribe of singular mind and set rigid in their moral stances. Idiosyncrasy brought debate, creativity and open-mindedness, but also dissidence born of varied outlook and motives. With the dragon war finished and the larger part of the habitable world colonised and divided, the younger races turned on themselves and each other in a period of bloody destruction known as the Battle Years. The epoch is widely considered to have lasted about 400 years, sandwiching the turn of the first millennium ER. It begins with the great Elven exodus in ER 807 and is traditionally considered to culminate in the bloody massacre of the Dwarven tribe of the Brindar in the hands of their Dark-Elven guests. That no other Dwarven clan visited vengeance upon those foul and black-hearted villains is testament to the degree to which Dwarven inter-clan fraternity had disintegrated. It was during the Battle Years that the sons of Ulmut challenged their father's choice of Agmere as his successor and smashed that great tribal confederation that once represented all humanity. Though the sources are scarcer, it seems likely that it was also during this period that the Wolven broke ranks, their various colonies becoming independent (much to their later cost). Those chaotic menaces the Orcs and their brutish cousins were already spread widely, from the first lacking leadership or cohesiveness. They at least suffered little during this period and must indeed have increased significantly in number, given the threat they posed in the coming centuries. This era also saw much great exploration and enterprise, as Guntark and his Dwarven clan took ship westward, lost forever to legend and rumour, while Agmere led his host of humans east into Darkwood and perhaps beyond. However, I linger too long on details which will be expounded fully in later chapters; here my purpose is merely to sketch lightly the sum of history past, to provide a framework. With that in mind we must journey on into the next great epoch, the Dark Years.

The Dark Years were characterised, if one can truly characterise a period spanning a millennium, by the slow

establishment of order across Korin–Thar. The chaos of the Battle Years left a divided world map, with numerous small tribal kingdoms and principalities struggling to assert themselves against the predation of Orcish and Ogerous raiders. The first centuries of the second millennium ER were hard indeed, but slowly humankind shifted towards the agrarian lifestyle pursued by the High-Elves and Dwarven clans, and tribes became kingdoms. As the Dark Years wore on the Crystal Isle became the northern gem of the world, lighting the way towards civilisation and prosperity. High-Elven culture experienced a period of unrivalled supremacy; their armies drove the Wolven from their mainland colonies, fuelled by the great economic benefits derived from a vibrant north-south trade along the Great River. The period culminated in the rediscovery of the arcane arts by the younger races (traditionally accredited to the mage Vorenius of Caread and the school he established, although there seems to have been a near simultaneous emergence of mystical law across various cultures). Scholars have traditionally assigned the transition from the Dark Years to the Tranquil Years that followed to the year 2311 ER. At this time, the treaty of Hanschlung, signed by the Elves of the Crystal Isle and the powerful recently coalesced Protectorate of the Great River, brought stability to north-south trade on more human-friendly terms.

The Tranquil Years are, of course, somewhat deceptively named. Minor wars remained common, as did the ceaseless raiding of Wolven and Orc, but their threat was generally well contained. Four major trends can be distinguished when attempting to capture the essence of this period (always the historian's goal). The first is the slow emergence of the eastern powers; the second, related trend, is the development of an east-west trade route; the third trend is the increasing dominance of human cultures in world politics; finally, the fourth and most important development within this period is the growth of wizardly power, especially in the Protectorate. I will deal with each of these trends in turn, but remind the reader to bear in mind their interrelated natures.

The Dark Years had seen the tentative formation of various human kingdoms to the south and east of the Scarlet Sea. Many of the descendants of Ulmut (and here I speak of legitimate offspring, respected war leaders and numerous power-hungry opportunists) at first formed smaller tribal confederacies, then slowly turned to agriculture and the ways of civilisation. While numerous kingdoms rose and fell in the Dark Years, reflecting the fortunes of would-be empire builders and conquerors, by the end of the period the eastern world had coalesced into a political shape recognisable to this day. The Kingdom of the Iron Ring had become dominant in the north east, while Karivda was well on the way to establishing its unity and independence. South of the Iron Ring, the Central City States were settling towards their current form, a bulwark of civilisation against the vicious tribesman of the Steppes. These powers were to increasingly assert their place in the new world order during the Tranquil Years, as governing traditions crystallised and internal and external threats were slowly resolved.

With increasing stability in the east came a new and powerful trading block that demanded the development of an east-west trading axis. While the Great River route remained the major artery for north-south trade, a thriving sea trade along the continent's northern coast (at continuous risk from Wolven and Viking predation) and two competing southern routes now supplemented it. The first, the older overland route established under Perizian protection during the Dark Years, greatly expanded in volume, despite the continued danger the Steppian tribesmen represented. At the same time, the Scarlet Sea route became increasingly viable with Karivdan unity better established, its chief danger being not the Viking raiders of the western mainland, but rather the infamous and unpredictably blood-thirsty currents of the Scarlet Sea itself.

The rise of human powers in the east was, however, mirrored and eclipsed by the development of a single dominant human empire in the west: the Protectorate of the Great River. The Protectorate had originally emerged from a trade coalition forged among the various trading posts along the Great River, but by the end of the Dark Years had expanded considerably to the south, thriving in particular upon the silk, spice and ivory trades. In terms of pure access to resources, the Protectorate surpassed its Elven and Dwarven competitors to arise as the dominant economic and military power in the old, rich west. Slowly but surely it expanded south and east through the savannah until finally, near the very end of the Tranquil Years, its expansive wave broke upon the borders of the isolated Southron Empire. The Southrons, until that point almost entirely separated from the ebb and flow of world events, now began a slow and cautious trade (of both goods and ideas) with the wider world.

The major idea possessed by the wider world and unknown in the Southron Empire related, of course, to the use of magic. Those with the skill, willpower and resources to learn the mystic arts were from the very start of the Tranquil Years beginning to assert themselves as local rulers, advisors and powerful civil servants. While those rare individuals capable of conquering the ways of magic were coming to prominence across Korin-Thar, their rise was nowhere as striking as in the Protectorate. Here the traditional governing body, a council of representatives from the Protectorate's various cities and provinces, came to be entirely dominated by a magic-using elite. These men of arcane might became in a very real sense the primary wielders of political power in Korin-Thar. And then, in 2944, came the One-War.

To the common man, the One-War must have been terrifying and inexplicable. When sorcerers fight, all around them feel the ravages of their magics and the creatures they summon to their aid. It is widely held that numerous mages, envious of one another's positions, instigated the One-War and were mutually responsible for its tragedy. This is probably not the case (I would suspect a tiny minority, or even a single individual to have been responsible), although the study of magic's subsequent relegation to a secretive, hated and underground occupation makes the history of the war's origins difficult to untangle. What is certain is that at the last the archmage Dakarath Deathsire had emerged

as the most powerful individual on the face of Korin-Thar. His remaining opponents grouped together and collected what little raw magic remained, in order to battle him at his secret citadel, located in the far east beyond Darkwood. Whatever civilisation flourished there must forever remain a mystery, for that final battle, the fire and fury of which was said to light the ceiling of the world for three nights on end, must surely have laid it waste. Its shock waves ripped asunder the very earth, bringing earthquakes and destruction across the known world. Thereafter, the wizards warred no more, but neither did they rule. In truth, they left little worth ruling; the end of the One-War dragged Korin-Thar into near a century of famine, disease and suffering, the very weather wrecked by the destructive discharge of mystic energy. The instinctive belief of the common man, that the practitioners of magic had never really fully understood or been in control of the dark powers they claimed to command, was thus spectacularly and tragically endorsed, and magic remains to this day a distrusted and hated medium.

The immediate aftermath of the One-War was terrible indeed. In the west, with the mages dead or in hiding, the Protectorate collapsed into a disorganised rabble of feuding principalities. Everywhere, agriculture failed and people died en masse, near two generations blighted by tragic famine. It is this period, a mere four centuries ago, that gave birth to our modern world, this current age for which we as yet have no name. The famine hit all of Korin-Thar hard, but a new equilibrium has arisen in its long shadow. The east is largely as it was, while in the west the Teleb Empire now claims much of the land once held by the Protectorate, a young religion finding eager followers among those ravaged by fire and famine. Trade thrives on luxury and all but collapsed during the famine, but has once again sprung up along the old routes. Our world is older, again standing proud now that the wounds are licked and healed. But are we wiser?"

Gren Cethel's account is in large part accurate, providing a good background to the Sixth Age of Korin-Thar. As Gren recounts, the standard historical framework posits a progression from Antiquity, to the Dream Years, to the Battle years, to the Dark Years, to the Tranquil Years (culminating in the One-War), to the Sixth Age. The further back in this sequence we search, the less agreement exists between cultures regarding historical or mythological fact. In the light of Gren's account, some important points relating to truths underlying magic and religion on Korin-Thar need to be made.

Korin-Thar has been subject to numerous arcane influences during its long history. It exists in a plane essentially constrained by a set of biological and physical laws. However, these laws can be bent and broken under influence from external planes of existence. The first such plane to influence events on Korin-Thar is the heavenly plane. On Korin-Thar, the stars are quite literally gateways to another realm. Through them it exerts its influence over Korin-Thar's many lifeforms, subtly altering the probabilistic laws of nature to determine outcomes at a macroscopic level. The stars are physical markers to the dimension of fate, offering insights and knowledge to those

learned in interpreting their movements (astrologers).

The second major other-worldly influence upon Korin-Thar came from the dimension of the raw magic, a chaotic plane of creative and destructive flux. While the original gateways to this plane have now been closed (the elder's central and, later, six subsidiary pools), the raw magical connection lasted long enough to leave an echo of its influence upon the foundation matter of Korin-Thar. Magic is now an intrinsic part of the world's fabric and can be called upon at will by those adept in its usage. One side effect of matter becoming suffused with magic was the creation of the spirit plane. The spirit plane is not strictly speaking an alternate dimension, but rather a kind of reflection of the physical world etched in the stuff of magic. Magic is bound up in all matter. Hence, every humanoid, animal, plant and even base element has an insubstantial representation of itself formed purely of magical energy. A being or object's "spirit" usually just mimics their activity, but on the spirit plane. However, because a spirit exists for as long as the physical matter it mirrors exists, living beings' spirits will often persevere beyond their death (until the majority of their constituent matter has decayed away). Many tribal cultures on Korin-Thar (which tend to base their religions around spirit knowledge and ancestor worship) consequently use elaborate preservative techniques in the burial of their dead (extending the lives of the spirits). Those with the necessary skills (usually shamans) can travel and observe the spirit plane, and talk to its occupants.

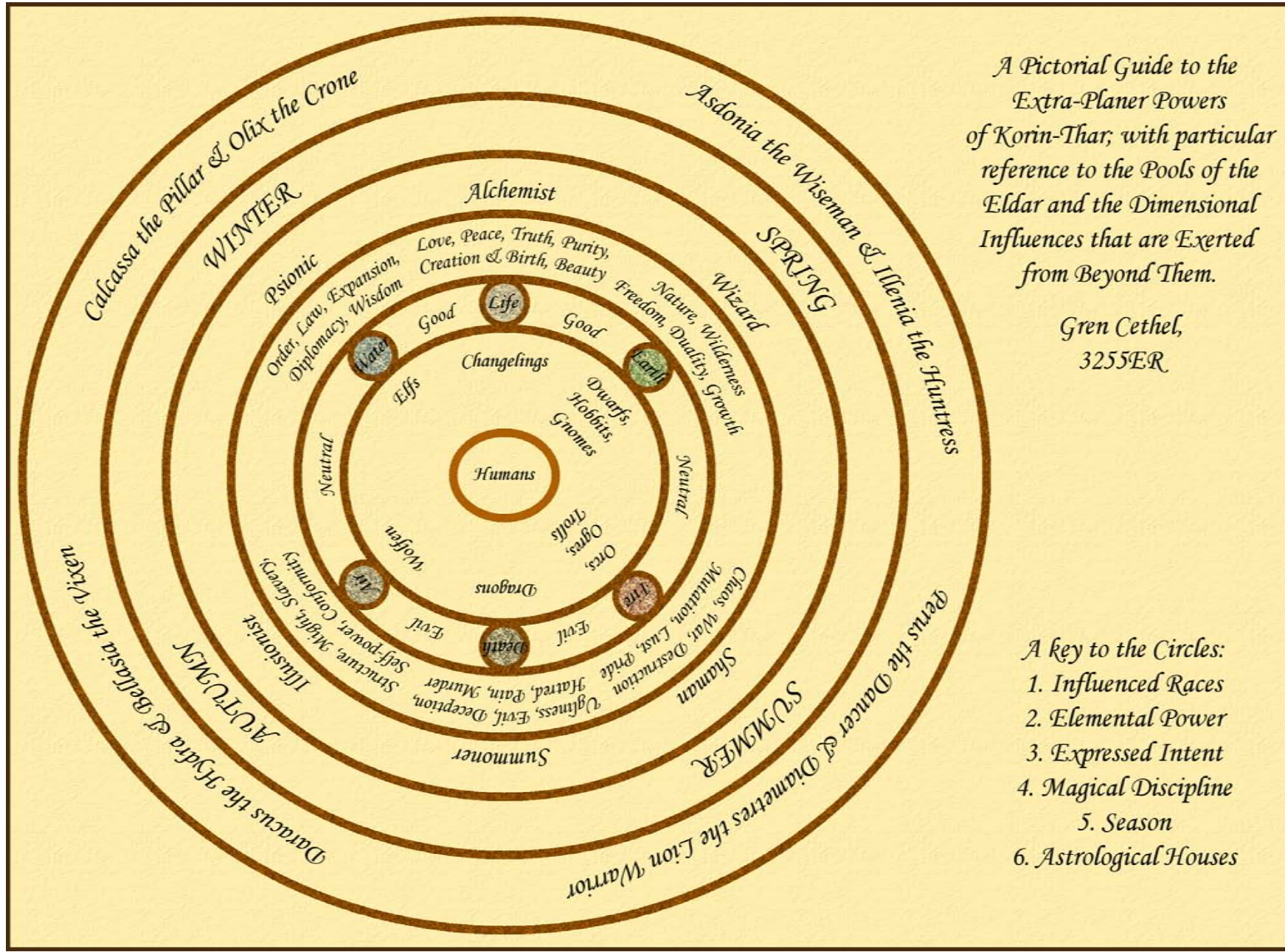
The final and most recent influence upon Korin-Thar comes from the dimensions of the powers. It was to these powers that the elders inadvertently turned when their empire was collapsing in upon itself. Each of the six remaining pools became (and remains) a portal to a dimension of one of the powers, allowing their energies to enter the mortal world. The six pools connect to the dimensions of fire, water, earth, air, life and death respectively. The influence of each power was immediately felt in the birth of a new proto-racial tribe and continues to be felt via the miracles performed by true priests. These two points will be dealt with in turn.

Gren describes the emergence of each proto-racial tribe fairly accurately, but fails to identify the power that gave form to each. In fact, the Elves were born of the dimension of water, the Dwarves, Hobbits and Gnomes trace their origins to the dimension of Earth, the Wolven emerged from the interaction of raw magic with the dimension of air and the Orcs, Ogres and Trolls are the offspring of the dimension of fire. The dimension of life influenced those elders who became Changelings, while the Dragons felt the call of the dimension of Death. It must be emphasised that while each race was initially strongly motivated by the power that bore them, the biological laws of Korin-Thar caused increasing variation within each emerging species, a fact that became evident in the Battle Years. Hence, for example, a modern Elf is in no way constrained to follow the path ordained by the dimension of water. Humans were from the first influenced by all six powers and are hence the most morally flexible of all the races.

Having lost any direct hold over the races they influenced, the dimensions of the powers now influence events on Korin-Thar via the few individual mortals they are able to establish a link with. These are the true priests.

The consciousness of a plane of power is so unfathomably alien to a mortal mind that only a very few individuals can be touched in this manner. Truly comprehending the powers' purpose is beyond even the true priests; they can only achieve some transient rapport and attempt to interpret otherworldly purpose in a humanoid, biological framework. They try to understand and give shape to the immense powers they sense beyond the physical world. Hence true priests quite literally invented (and continue to invent) the Gods. A God, or a religion, is the consequence of a humanoid mind attempting to understand messages from a particular power. Often, this will result in a degree of anthropocentric thinking: Gods are often seen as men, or at least perceived to possess the drives, motivations and concerns of men. Typically, a religious father (founding figure) will appreciate only some facets of a given dimension's scope, such that substantially different religious bodies may be worshipping different aspects of the same other-dimensional power. For example, worshippers of Backnar, the Iron Ring God of honour and war, are in fact serving the dimension of fire, just as are the jungle tribes of southern Darkwood who worship Slavana, spirit of chaos. True priests receive miraculous skills in exchange for extending a power's influence on Korin-Thar. Many religions also promise potential rewards after death (and may perhaps be correct in this assumption), but what lies beyond death and the spirit world remains an open question.

While these various mystical influences exist in isolation, they have blended to affect Korin-Thar in an interconnected manner that can be modelled by a single system. The framework is best understood when viewed pictorially. This introductory chapter therefore concludes with a schematic representation of the mystical world system underlying life on Korin-Thar.



2. Kingdoms and Cultures

2.1 The Kingdom of the Iron Ring

History. Located in the north-eastern corner of the civilised world, the Kingdom of the Iron Ring is among the oldest of extant human sedentary civilisations. Emerging in the Dark Years (around the 18th century ER) the kingdom's name is derived from a walled road linking three ancient settlements set atop hills about Lake Silversheen. Economically bolstered by an abundance of good-quality iron ore, the territory controlled by these towns gradually expanded; at its zenith, the kingdom controlled not only its current lands but also substantial parts of modern day Karivda and the northern Central City States. The great highway about Lake Silversheen has been rebuilt many times over the years, but remains an architectural wonder, wide, paved and adorned with a high palisade set with numerous spikes of steel. The capital, Vivada, is built upon the site of one of the original three settlements, and is now a mishmash of ancient and modern architectural styles. Following its recovery in the wake of the One-War, the kingdom finally gave up its claims to suzerainty over Karivda such that friendly trade is now the norm. To its south, a policy of funding and encouraging political rivalries among the Central City States has generally ensured safety by preventing the emergence of a unified threat. Most of the kingdom's real warfare arises internally (from feudal rivalries) or as a result of regular campaigns against the Orcish tribes to the north and east, although the occurrence of regular coastal raids by both the Wolven and human vikings remains an irritation.

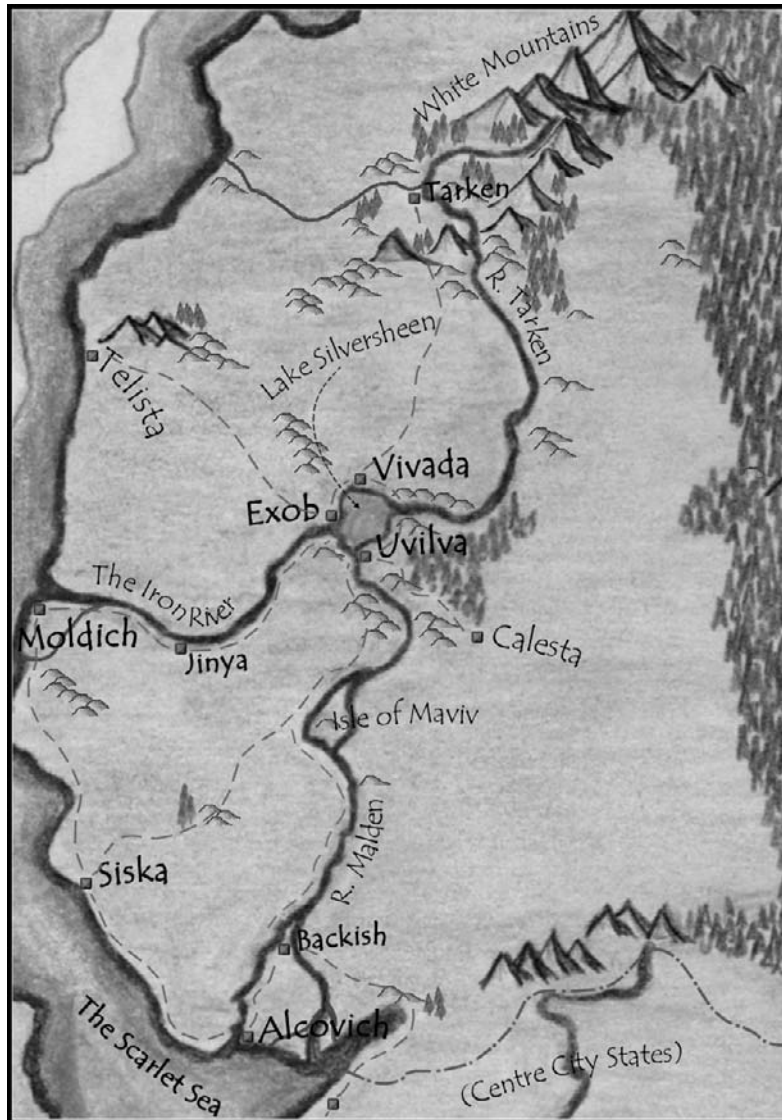
Politics. The kingdom is essentially feudal and agrarian. The high king demands loyalty (in the form of military assistance) from his great magnates, in exchange for their land and privileges. They in turn hand out provinces to the knightly classes in exchange for promises of serv-

ice. The feudal contract therefore permeates society. At each level, a liege lord offers rights, land and the provision of law through his courts in exchange for loyalty and some form of service or payment. The exact details of any feudal contract will vary, and are strongly influenced by local tradition. Privileges and contractual rights also extend beyond the lifetime of a particular individual; the great magnates consider the land they hold "from the king" to be their familial birthright and heritage. At the bottom level of society are the serfs, peasants whose feudal con-

tract with their immediate overlord gains them protection, peace and an allocation of land to work in exchange for a proportion of their produce. Generally, the system works fairly smoothly, although there are some complexities and exceptions that can cause tensions (the exact status of the mercantile classes, for example). The king can demand the provision of military assistance from his magnates and assemble a large and effective army of knights for a limited period each year. These men hold land from their liege lords, gaining income from these holdings such that they can devote their time to honing combat skills. They are extremely competent combatants, particularly effective

in their traditional role as heavy cavalry, although varied loyalties and the "call up" nature of the Iron Ring military makes it somewhat undisciplined en masse. Less professional troops are called up at the king's expense around this knightly core. The king retains direct control of extensive lands (the royal domain) in order to ensure a substantial income for the royal treasury, but his most substantial income is effectively in kind (combat services) so the royal coffer is not huge relative to that of more absolute political rulers. Only a small navy is maintained.

Religion. The Kingdom of the Iron Ring is somewhat unusual, in that it plays host to numerous minor and



major religions espousing radically different dogmas, rather than a single monotheistic faith or polytheistic pantheon (in which numerous Gods are worshipped, but within a unified overall belief system). It is remarkable that such a situation should exist without giving rise to large-scale religious tensions, and says a great deal about the essentially practical nature of the typical Iron Ring inhabitant's mind set. Among the more popular Gods to receive worship here are Backnar, God of honour and war, Quarerigi, Goddess of law and peace, and Dolmi the healer, God of love and truth. Forever lurking in the shadows of Iron Ring life is the secretive but powerful cult of Dergoth, God of bloody vengeance.

Backnar is particularly popular among the knightly classes, but he holds a wide appeal and his church is probably the closest thing to a state religion that exists in the Iron Ring. Its doctrine can be traced to texts written and publicised by three brothers, knights who in the year 1934 ER experienced a simultaneous vision while on campaign in the far north. This vision is widely held to have been communicated through the medium of a golden washing vessel, the legendary gift of Ferendis. The three brothers renounced their names in an act of fealty to their new overlord and God, and are simply referred to as the interpreters. Nowadays, an efficient hierarchy of scarlet-robed clergy oversee Backnar's numerous many-arched, grey, square and fortress-like churches (true priests are red in game terms). The needs of the laity are dealt with here. In the background, Backnar's business is attended to by a monastic order known as the knights of the holy flame. These men are efficient and practised combatants, and swear oaths of obedience, chastity, fraternity and courage. Their symbol is a single blue flame on a silver background.

Quarerigi came to the Iron Ring through the unlikely medium of a blind peasant girl found washed up on the beaches of the western Iron Ring Coast in the 23rd century ER. She lived only a few weeks past her "discovery", by which time she had been taken some way inland, but her feverish ranting so affected the inhabitants of the then village of Backish that when, upon her death, a curative spring erupted from the villages' bedrock the elders took it upon themselves to propagate a new religion. Their faithful recordings of her complex and often contradictory statements form the basis of a faith that emphasises meditation, study and the cultivation of a personal and intuitive religiosity. Priests and priestesses of Quarerigi (blue in game terms) are wanderers, not temple dwellers, guardians of a theology that is essentially experiential rather than explicable. They wear simple clothes, but bear rings with the symbol of a triple fountain etched upon them.

Dolmi the healer is symbolically represented by a naked, androgynous figure curled foetally about a sapling. Dolmi's simple doctrines were originally spread by Reatocles, a mysterious wanderer who entered the Iron Ring in the 24th century ER as a tender of the sick. Reatocles was said to cure by taking upon himself the ailments of his patients, and to have willingly died curing the mortal wound of a man already condemned to death at the gallows. It is of theological importance that this prisoner was guilty of quite despicably wicked crimes, and mocked the old man's final act. Dolmi's temples are hexagonal with domed roofs, each administered by a single yellow-robed priest who trains a single white-robed acolyte (white

priests in game terms). They never refuse refuge.

The mysterious cult of Dergoth is essentially a secret society of immense proportions, with members from all social classes. Subscribers always attend the rare gatherings masked and cloaked, such that identities are known only to those within the upper echelons of the cult. All forms of sacrifice (especially human) and orgiastic depravity are commonplace at these meetings. Priests (black in game terms) are known as dispensers, and are cruel and utterly merciless. Dergoth's symbol is a saw-bladed dagger.

Other Powers. The major non-feudal powers in the Iron Ring are the guilds, associations formed by men in a particular profession to safeguard standards and prices. Guildmasters often wield considerable patronage, and guildhouses are often deliberately grandiose to demonstrate the guild's influence and prestige.

Peoples. The people of the Iron Ring tend to be of average build and fair skin. Thin beards or moustaches are favoured, with hair cropped short for men and tied into single long braids for women. Red, brown and blond hair are all common, while black is a real rarity. Many non-humans are relatively well tolerated here, often living in separate quarters, but Orcs and Wolven are particularly hated. Iron Ring folk speak the common tongue, while virtually all written communication uses the Reyaldric script.

Trade, climate and demographics. The Iron Ring's climate is generally temperate, but varies a good deal from the chill north to the far milder south. The Kingdom boasts a population of around twelve million, the vast majority being peasant farmers. Internal and external trade are both vibrant, although a little stilted by the powerful guild system. Major exports include processed linen and metal goods, especially weapons and armour, as the Kingdom's mines remain bountiful. While the only major mountain range lies to the north-east, reaching altitudes of around 5000 metres, there are numerous highland and hilly areas, particularly in the north and central (Lake Silversheen) regions.

Cities. Vivada is the capital of the realm, an ancient and sprawling city. The royal palace can be found here, an impressive fortress of red-veined marble.

Also located on the Iron Ring highway are Uvilva, a rich city built upon impressive mineral wealth and the traditional estate of the heir apparent, and Exob, the seat of justice, half destroyed but rebuilt during the One-War.

Of the Kingdom's three major trading ports, Moldich lies farthest to the north, and is primarily concerned with Elven trade. It also plays host to the Kingdom's small navy. Siska is now the most thriving port, dealing especially with Karivdan trade and boasting an exotic and cosmopolitan mix of inhabitants. Alcovich, further to the south, was superseded long ago, a victim of decadence with a reputation for underworld activity.

Other cities of note include Backish, a major centre of pilgrimage for those seeking the assistance of the Goddess Quarerigi and her miraculous fountains, and Jinya, an ancient and cultured settlement treasuring a rare near-

democratic charter that encourages public debate in the main square.

Available occupations. All human occupations except: Hoplite, immortal, ninja, samurai, shaman (northern), shaman (southern), tribesman, viking.

2.2 Karivda

History. The land occupied by the modern island state of Karivda had been inhabited since earliest times by scattered groups of human tribesmen, but was more fully colonised and put to the plough at the very end of the second millennium ER. Colonies sprang up along the east coast first, largely peopled by migrants from the thriving Kingdom of the Iron Ring, but with a number of colonies from the Central City States also emerging. The slow push to the west over the following few centuries displaced the numerous Viking coastal settlements to the north and west, as well as the remaining forest tribal groupings of the interior. Inevitably, as the island's economic and military potential became apparent it attracted the attention of the Kingdom of the Iron Ring, which had established effective control over around two thirds of Karivda's colonised territory by the time of the signing of the Upland treaty of ER 2240.

However, Iron Ring suzerainty was relatively short lived. The populace in Karivda, from the first of enterprising and independent stock, balked at what was now viewed as foreign oppression. The Iron Ring was (and remains) badly equipped to control land overseas. Local lords, struggling to keep check over a constantly expanding territory, could expect little help from a central government without a decent navy or regular standing army. The various Karivdan provinces were disparate, with differing origins and traditions, but in the face of Iron Ring aggression a Karivdan national consciousness began to emerge. The unity movement culminated in the seizure of all Karivdan territory under a new state government and the ejection of the minimal Iron Ring bureaucracy, completed in 2372. These events spelt the beginnings of genuine Karivdan control over the Scarlet Sea. By the late 25th century ER, Karivda had come to dominate this important trade route. Minor wars with the Iron Ring continued to erupt until the outbreak of the One-War, but hostilities have largely lapsed in its aftermath, and with its internal territory secure modern Karivda suffers only sporadic warfare, primarily at the hands of Wolven and Viking raiders.

Politics. Karivda is an oligarchy, ruled by a council of wealthy merchants and landowners elected from amongst their own number by the three or so percent of the population eligible to vote. The system by which one may gain a vote is extremely confusing and variable, but by and large the right to vote (as much a matter of prestige as anything) is purchased at auction for a small number of years at a time. The council are naturally extremely responsive to the desires of their supporters; as there is no limitation on the number of votes an individual may hold, in Karivda your political influence is very obviously and directly linked to your disposable wealth. The income derived from the purchase of votes, or "emperor tithe", is used to pay for the large and efficient Karivdan navy, the state's most effective defence against foreign aggression. Despite inevitable corruption, the system actually works quite well, and Karivda is generally well governed. The ruling classes are selfish and greedy, but recognise that their own fortunes are intimately linked with those of the state as a whole. The council derives its income from a

complex taxation system that generally favours free trade, supported by a civil service largely peopled by the sons of the very ruling class it represents. The state's small standing army is largely maintained by the imposition of a one-year conscription period for male city-dwelling citizens, a duty that falls mainly on the middle classes (as exemption can be bought) and which is widely resented and avoided. The army is, therefore, with the exception of an elite section formed from paid mercenaries, of rather poor quality.

Religion. While Karivda still plays host to a number of religions of Iron Ring or Central City State origin, the vast majority of its citizens now worship at the various alters dedicated to the pantheon of the waves. The origins of the individual members of the pantheon are rather ob-

prise, exploration and good fortune (selfishness); Karagmarin the reaver, lord of warriors (combat); and Tahismarin, lady of serpents (manipulation). These four act as lawyers, vying for the souls of the dead. In game terms, their true priests are white, grey, red and black respectively. While all are generally modelled in human form in the many statues erected to honour them, symbolically they are represented by a silver wave, a golden albatross, an iron shield and an ebony snake. It is believed that if the God you favour wins your soul, you will enjoy an appropriate and bountiful afterlife. If another God wins your soul, you are at least desirable and will suffer relatively little as a slave to the worshippers of that God. The worst fate is to be stranded between the mortal plane and the eternal spirit gardens beyond, a fate awaiting those prized by no deity (whose souls therefore go undefended).

Other powers. Within the rich, Karivdan mercantile classes the heads of the ancient banking families hold a position of particular esteem. Their prudent financial activities form the bedrock of the Karivdan economy, and while they generally refrain from seeking direct election to the ruling council (with its associated degree of public accountability) their voices rarely go unheeded when important policies are being formed.

Peoples. The men of Karivda tend to be a little taller than average, and thinner to match. They are usually of tanned complexion and go clean shaven or wear thin moustaches. Brown hair is by far the most common, with a few blond- or black-haired individuals and virtually no redheads. A variety of hairstyles



scure. Many seem to have been worshipped under other names in the early colonies, or even to have been adopted from the island's original tribal occupants, but the religion as a whole emerged in the 23rd and 24th century ER. The unification of various disparate Gods under a single theological framework and their subsequent adoption of mutually compatible roles clearly reflects the general movement towards unity and uniformity within Karivdan culture at that time.

At the head of the pantheon is Agmarin the stormholder, lord of law, who presides over the oceanic court. His priests (blue in game terms) wear the symbol of a great white whale upon their broad black headbands. Agmarin is traditionally offered sacrifice and prayer by those seeking justice or the reversal of misfortune. While numerous minor deities perform functions at his court, the four other major players are: Ishmarin, lady of the white waves (beauty, freedom); Bashmarin, lord of enter-

are popular. Non humans are generally well tolerated despite being relatively rare, with the exception of Wolven who are universally feared and despised. Karivdans speak common and typically use the Reyaldric script.

Trade, climate and demographics. The Karivdan climate is temperate and its island nature guards it well against climatic extremes, with relatively little seasonal change in temperature. It boasts a population of around a million, the majority of which is settled on or near the coast (the Karivdan interior remains quite marshy and underpopulated). While most people are involved in the production of food (through farming or fishing) Karivda thrives as a trading nation, dominating the speedy Scarlet Sea trade route between east and west. Karivda is not a great industrial powerhouse, with little in the way of industry except that produced for the home market; rather, they carry the goods of the world, fed by a demand for

luxury goods from far-flung kingdoms.

Cities. Hoknan is the capital of the realm, a great sprawling city that continues to grow inland. It is arguably the greatest port in the world, with a market to match (known as the Everfair) and a great host of ships (mostly Karivdan) always in port. The city is said to be built upon the ruins of a great dungeon, a place inhabited by the Eldar race in antiquity. To the west of the city centre a huge public park plays host to the senate house, a grand granite building in which the council convenes to do business.

Sceerob is the provincial capital of south-western Karivda, a sleepy rural city far removed from the pace of the capital. It serves mainly as a centre of commerce for the peasant farmers working the fertile southern Karivdan plane.

Karivda's third and smallest city, Tereban, is situated beyond the barren northern hills, a port that stands protected to east and west by imposing cliffs. It is primarily a garrison town, acting as a training post and bulwark against Wolven hostility.

Available occupations. All human occupations except: Hoplite, immortal, knight, ninja, samurai, shaman (northern), shaman (southern), tribesman, viking.

2.3 The Central City States

History. The Central City States are a disparate group of small principalities and kingdoms located to the south of the Kingdom of the Iron Ring. While it is impossible to do justice to their diversity within a single brief historical overview, certain commonalities can be highlighted. The general geographical area came under the plough in the Dark Years and was from the start resilient to the imposition of any unifying authority. Local rulers, typically based around some military stronghold or centre of commerce, attempted to bring the surrounding rural areas under their direct control such that a pattern emerged with a single city dominating its adjacent agricultural areas but holding little sway beyond them. Rivalries and mutual mistrust have prevented the establishment of larger political units; consequently, the impressive economic and military potential of this agriculturally rich area has never been fully realised. Most of the north was for a brief period under Iron Ring dominion (in the 21st and 22nd centuries ER, with a gradual loss of Iron Ring influence thereafter). Similarly, various warlords have briefly succeeded in bringing a number of cities under their control (most notably Kearos the hammerhand in the 26th century ER, who briefly unified around two thirds of this territory). However, rarely has more than a generation or two passed before local independence is reasserted and these mini-empires collapse. By and large, their emergence and success has depended upon the single-mindedness of a powerful personality. The machinery of government and weight of local tradition is so varied across the Central City States that establishing a stable new order has proved impossible.

Politics. The precise political set-ups of the various states vary considerably and will be dealt with in the individual city descriptions. In general, surrounding villages pay taxes in exchange for protection and the provision of justice, and small but efficient standing armies are maintained for local defence (intermittent border warfare being the norm). In the north, Iron Ring subterfuge and diplomacy actively encourages local rivalries, to prevent the establishment of any potentially threatening alliance.

Religion. See individual city descriptions.

Other powers. Because the sphere of influence of each city state tends to be fairly limited and controversy over borders remains such a potentially explosive issue, bandit activity along trade routes and inter-state borders is particularly rife. Bandit gangs can be extremely large and well equipped; indeed, it is not unknown, following the resolution of minor wars, for entire disbanded mercenary companies to take up residence in disputed areas, living off the plunder of local communities.

Peoples. The people of the Central City States tend to be of average build, with lightly tanned skin. Brown hair predominates, with less blacks and reds, and very few blonds. Styles and fashions vary considerably across local boundaries, and most of the states support only a very small non-human population. Common is the language

spoken right across the region, while the Reyaldric script is widely employed.

Trade, climate and demographics. Trade is vital in the Central City States, as the provinces' small sizes make them extremely dependent upon foreign imports for all but subsistence goods. Most of the states support a particular local industry of unusual quality, relying heavily on that product to balance trade. While there is little in the way of an organised guild system, most state governments rely on tariffs collected on trade passing through their territory to supplement rural taxation, so the movement of goods through this geographical region can prove surprisingly expensive.

The region has a warm-temperate climate (above 30° C on average in the summer months) and is well irrigated by an extensive river system, forming a natural basin descending from Darkwood in the east towards the Scarlet Sea. While it is somewhat prone to flooding (particularly the coastal regions) the rich black soil reliably yields an excellent and varied crop. For this reason, the area is quite densely populated, supporting around 15 million inhabitants, with an unusually high proportion of them living in urban settlements.

Cities. While the Central City States boast some 23 independent provinces, details are provided here for only six of the major players.

Periz is among the most ancient of the Central City States (established in the 18th century ER), positioned on the region's south-west border right on the edge of the Southern Steppes. It is a magnificent fortress city, built in sandstone and marble and occupying the centre of an enormous crater about 50 miles inland from the coast. Five impressive watchtowers guard the only easy points of descent from the raised surrounding plane into the crater's interior. The city itself has three concentrically arranged sections, rising like a wedding cake. Each is encased in an imposing curtain wall and can easily be defended. The outer city is a place of trade, accommodation and work, open to Periz's many visiting merchants and housing the majority of the working classes (artisans and tradesmen). The second section houses Periz's upper class, the citizens; it is leafy and beautiful, built almost entirely in marble with an unrivalled sanitation system. Finally, the upper city houses the senate house itself and the homes of the senators.

Periz is probably the most militaristic city on Korin-Thar. It has no real industry of its own, but rather makes its money by organising and guarding trade caravans across

the overland east-west trade route to the south of the Scarlet Sea. Merchants pay a hefty sum for Perizian protection against the savage attentions of the tribesmen who occupy the Southern Steppes. While the overland route is slow, it represents less of a risk than the Scarlet Sea route, where numerous ships are lost to unpredictable currents and swells. The tribesmen are dangerous opponents, but the Perizian military is notoriously well organised and deadly. Every male citizen (member of the hereditary ruling class) must serve ten campaigning seasons; they are prepared for this role by a vigorous training as a hoplite, a fine soldier with total commitment. Fighting in ranked units with spear, shield and gladius, the tactical superiority and bravery of the hoplites make them more than a match for far larger but less disciplined forces. The hoplites wear red cloaks,

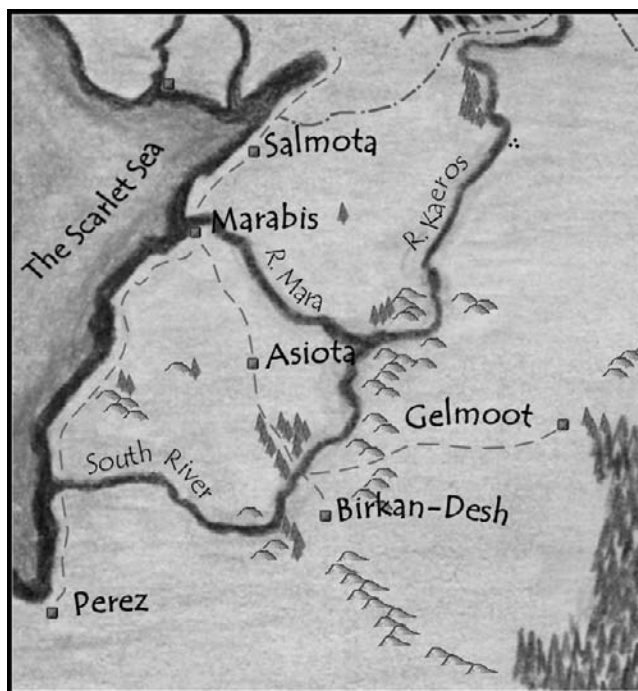
which are important symbols of rank (red dye being expensive and rare). For major military expeditions, they are supported by regular soldiers of lower-class stock.

Periz is ruled by an executive triumvirate, a council of three who can act rapidly in a crisis. For important but non-urgent decisions regarding legislation they must consult the senate, a body elected by the citizens to conduct government. The senate also act as the city's highest court, although most judicial decisions are made at the point of dispute by military officers on the "legal tour" (policing duty).

The Perizian establishment is tolerant towards

a number of religions, but the most widely worshipped deity within the city is Argai, who personifies might, bravery, loyalty and pride. He is usually represented as a red-cloaked hoplite, undaunted against a superior enemy. His priests also wear red, ministering to the lay folk from impressive dome-roofed marble temples. Argai's followers are not monotheistic; they recognise that he coexists with other Gods in the heavenly plane, but consider that when the cycle of heaven and earth nears completion and the Gods come to do battle, it is Argai and his followers that will victoriously inherit the future. True priests of Argai are red in game terms.

Marabis is an ancient, sprawling port city built about the estuary of the river Mara. The fertile flood planes about the city support a diverse and rich agricultural yield. However, ever since its establishment in the 20th century ER, Marabis' wealth has come primarily from its oil, both the black oil of the earth and the highly sought after cooking oil of its many olive groves. Its wealth is immediately proclaimed to all those coming into port, clearly heralded by the architectural wonder that is the portbridge. This enormous span, undoubtedly the longest bridge in the known world, protects the city from sea-born invasion. Its many-arched length supports an enormous iron chain,



which can be pulled taught to hang suspended some six feet above sea level, an effective blockade against any enemy war vessel.

Marabis is an absolute monarchy; the reigns of power are firmly held by the high prince, who accepts political advice from trusted members of the upper classes. The monarchy relies on a small, primarily upper-class civil service, a standing army of professional soldiers and a mutually beneficial “special relationship” with the government of Karivda to maintain its position. It has known peace and prosperity for many years and its major difficulties now arise from the sporadic danger of flooding, against which numerous engineering projects have proved ineffective. The city has only two hills, one of which boasts the royal palace, the other one hosting an unusually crowded quarter for the richer landed and mercantile classes.

The Marabic approach to religion has always been remarkably syncretic. Fundamentally, the principality derives its religious dogma from the writing of one of its early monarchs, prince Egrain IV, who was inspired to espouse a theology recognising all matter as the manifestation of a single divine being in whose life we all share. Foreign religions are welcomed and soon gain followers in Marabis, but their clergy are usually frustrated to find that their deity is demoted to a state in which he or she coexists with numerous other powers and spirits as reflections of an underlying divinity. Most of the world’s religions are represented here, but few gain true, theologically converted believers.

The Earldom of *Asiota* is located at the centre of the Central City States, relying upon a world-famous glass industry for its economic survival. The surrounding region was politically unified around the end of the 20th century ER, when the coming together of three powerful local families elevated a geographically defensible village at the midpoint of their influence to a regional capital. The city’s founding charter states that the sceptre of state (denoting rule of the province) should remain with one of these families until such time as a female child is born first to a ruling earl, at which point the succession passes to the next family in line. Needless to say this has led to countless infanticides perpetrated upon female children and hardly paved the way for political stability. Association through marriage with one of the three family names that can lead to a claim on the sceptre is gold dust to the large and ruthlessly politicised upper class. It is extremely rare for a succession to go unchallenged and not be marked by bloodshed, and almost as unusual for a ruling earl to die of natural causes. Indeed it is not just in politics that the Asiatic upper classes are ruthless; they have a reputation for cruelty and a haughtiness that mirrors their obsession with lineage. Petty conflicts and disagreements are resolved in the city’s many blood caverns, enclosed arenas where aristocratic lords and ladies pit their champions against one another for money and pride.

Politically, the earl decides foreign policy and most matters of state, but relies heavily on family loyalties and negotiated support for survival. He commands the army, but it is barracked outside the city itself and can do little to ensure his position. His imposition of taxation is therefore somewhat delicate and strategic. Law in *Asiota* is

extremely arbitrary, as nobles tend to control their neighbourhoods exactly as they choose. A just or compassionate Asiatic noble is a rarity and few are willing to cross one on his/her own ground.

Religiously, *Asiota* is polytheistic. A form of ancestor worship is practised, with a small and extremely select clergy occasionally elevating a dying person to the position of saint, worthy of worship. Sacrifices are offered to the saints in exchange for good fortune or assistance with more specific desires. One’s place in the afterlife is predestined regardless of worldly conduct, lasting an equal number of years to those granted on the mortal plane, except for the saints, who have gained eternal life (as long as they want it) but must attend to the affairs of mortals. The clergy select a new child to join their brown-robed ranks whenever one of their number dies. They enjoy an almost uniquely secure position within Asiatic society; their opinions are widely respected and their council regularly sought as only they are in direct contact with the saints (who inform all their decisions). The clergy occupy a single temple, an unadorned six-story tower near the city’s west gate. In game terms they are grey.

Salmota lies to the north, near the Iron Ring border, set among fairly rugged and rolling countryside. Local agriculture depends heavily upon shepherding and the city’s major industry is the production of woollen goods. Established in the late 26th century ER (following the near total desolation of this geographical region by the armies of Kearos the hammerhand) *Salmota* was from the first strongly influenced by the Kingdom of the Iron Ring, and maintains regular diplomatic contact with its mighty northern neighbour. Iron Ring Gods are popular here (particularly Dolmi the healer, whose first prophet Reatocles, it is claimed, grew up in the area where *Salmota* now stands), but coexist among other faiths in relative harmony.

Salmota has a hereditary king, but his powers are held in check by a precisely worded founding constitution, such that he is not above the law, but rather is its servant. His power is consequently far from absolute and members of the Salmotian civil service (judges and taxgatherers being combined under the single office of sheriff) are expert in interpreting a large body of legal precedent that has developed around the kingdom’s founding document. A standing army is maintained at the king’s expense (although obviously his income is derived from taxation) and is particularly renowned for its reliance upon and devastating use of the halberd and pike in military encounters. The city is most famous, however, for the six day festival of the harvest it hosts in spring of each year, a local holiday that attracts visitors from far abroad to marvel at a cosmopolitan blend of theatre, dance, sport and alcoholic excess.

Built in the east near the borders of Darkwood, *Gelmoot* began life as a trappers’ settlement, but these days depends more on Darkwood’s exotic flora than its fauna, exploiting the forest’s diverse and unique hardwood stock for the international market. Although initially established in the 24th century ER, *Gelmoot* was little more than a market village until a period of rapid expansion in the 31st century under the autocrat Helamut Kandathal. Kandathal, whose statues can be found all over the city, galvanised

the population into rejecting the suzerainty of the principality of Brenach to the west, establishing an independent province and leading a peasant army in a heroic first defence. The political balance he bequeathed in his will is still upheld; each of his sons received a single office, to be passed on in a hereditary manner to their offspring. Hence Gelmoot has no prince, but rather a council, composed of five hereditary members: minister of defence, minister of common law, minister of trade, minister of agriculture and high priest. Kandathal was recognised as an avatar of the forest spirit Brenacath almost immediately after his death, and the vast majority of the population adhere to his druidic beliefs. The hereditary council members are therefore powerfully religiously ordained, having in them the blood of the earth.

Modern Gelmoot is a wealthy enough province, but has few stone buildings. This reflects the abundance of wood as a raw material, but also the marshy nature of the surrounding land, which often proves unsuitable for stone foundations. Roads made of tree trunks lashed together are used widely in place of cobbled stone ones or dirt tracks, with regular replacement being necessary in outlying regions as sections are reclaimed by the swampy ground. Elaborate woodcarving as an architectural feature has reached new heights here, a major indicator of the wealth and prestige of a building's occupants (particularly given that multi-story buildings are extremely rare). Gelmoot now maintains a professional militia, almost entirely infantry based due to prevailing ground conditions and particularly respected for its prowess with bow and axe.

Birkan-Desh lies south-centrally on the central-city plain, breathtaking at a distance as a result of its blue-tinted buildings built in the copper-rich local stone. The surrounding countryside provides lush pasture, and is the bedrock for one of Birkan-Desh's major industries: horse husbandry. An enormous variety of breeds are raised here for the world market, from sleek race horses for the Teleb upper classes to heavy-set war horses for the knights of the Iron Ring. Not surprisingly, the principality's small standing army is cavalry based, a striking sight in their sky blue cloaks with sabres and shields held aloft.

The other major export here depends upon the crystal-clear water that bubbles up from beneath the city. A clear spirit of unusual quality is distilled here, named *Deshka*. The finest *Deshka* is made under royal license and receives the Prince's seal before export. The Prince holds his title by hereditary right, and is the ultimate legal and political authority. However, the Birkan-Desh royalty have always considered themselves both rulers and guardians of the state and the Prince's second title, chief of cavalry, is more than honorific. Leading from the front is an important royal tradition.

The theological underpinnings of Birkan-Desh society centre around a near-tribal world view in which most natural forces are personified as arbitrary or even cruel spirits. Hence each river or hill has its own spirit requiring respect if it is not to behave in a callous manner. The most powerful of all spirits is the spirit of the wind, *Aeroza*, who is worshipped at carefully maintained shrines and has his own priesthood (red in game terms). His symbol is a white pegasus. The afterlife is viewed as a blissful place where the whims of the spirits no longer constrain life

choices.

Available occupations. For Central City States other than Periz, all human occupations except: Hoplite, immortal, knight, ninja, samurai, shaman (northern), shaman (southern), tribesman, viking.

For Periz, all human occupations except: Mercenary, immortal, knight, ninja, samurai, shaman (northern), shaman (southern), tribesman, viking.

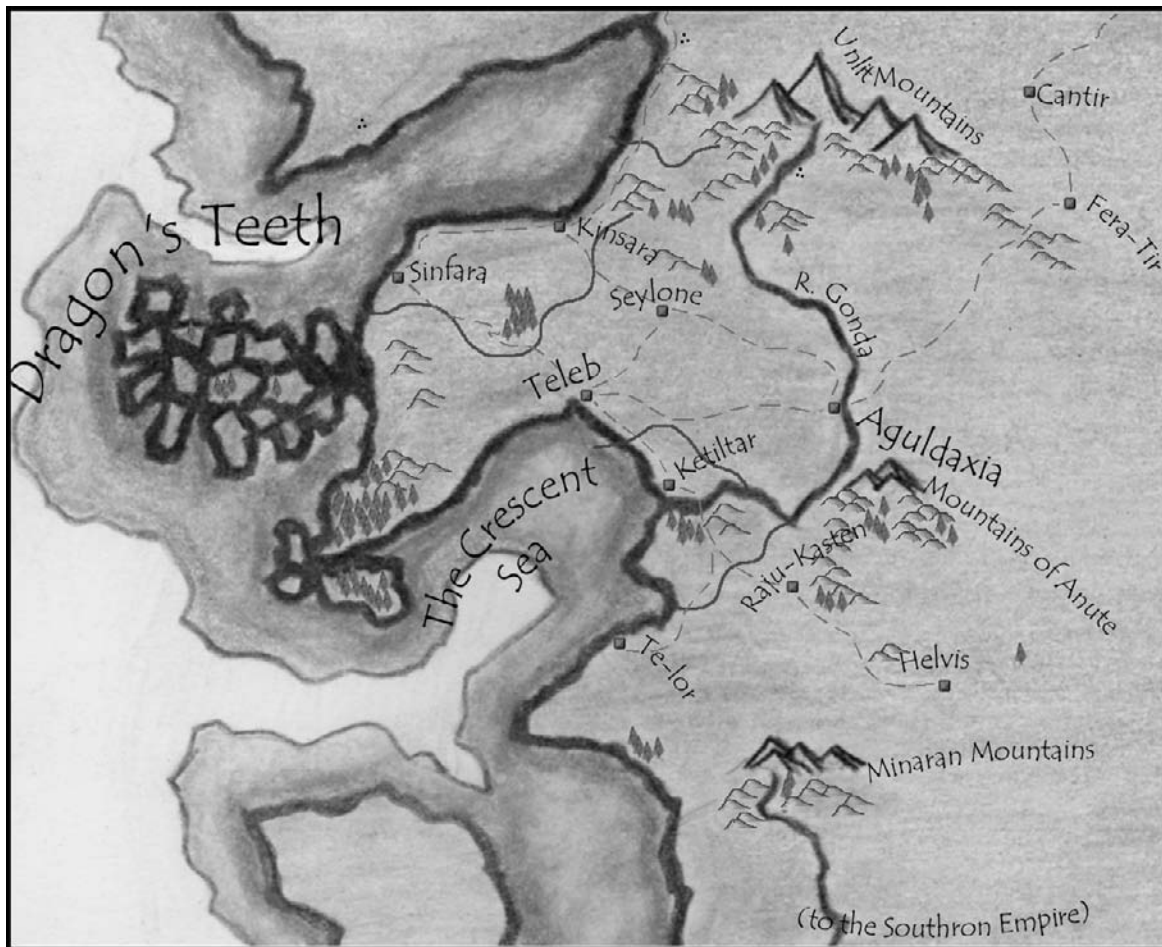
2.4 The Teleb Empire

History. The Teleb Empire is a relatively young power, although the territory it occupies has played a central role in civilised history for millennia, having previously been controlled by the Protectorate of the Great River. Following the One-War, the political unity of this vast area was smashed. A power vacuum at the top, in combination with atrocious agricultural conditions and the collapse of trade led to the emergence of numerous small states under the control of local warlords. Into this chaotic, war-torn and famine-struck malaise was born Agulda the Cleric, first prophet of the One God Anute.

Agulda's early life is unremarkable. The second son

of the doctrine of the One God in a series of theological and practical texts, established a hierarchical clergy and unified the entire area around the Crescent Sea under the control of the new Teleb Empire. He had also completed one of the most spectacular architectural achievements yet conceived, the enormous black-marble pyramidal prime temple of Anute, located at the new capital of the realm, Gondala (later renamed Aguldaxia).

Agulda's work was taken up with vigour by his sons. As faithful servants of Anute, they were all powerfully driven to spread the word, and also to give it physical form by enforcing unity and cohesion at the political level. By the mid 32nd century ER the Teleb Empire had expanded to its current immense size, a state founded on a religious



of a wealthy landowner, he trained as a soldier in the protection of his father's lands. However, in the year 2997 ER at age 19 he became lost on a fishing expedition and during his 15 days at sea received a profound revelation. Upon his return home he immediately made for the nearest town, the western port city of Teleb on the coast of the Crescent Sea, and there offered his revelation to the city's ruler Sultan Habib VII. So persuasive was Agulda that the dying sultan put his military resources at this young man's disposal and at once ordered the conversion of his entire court to the new religion. His faith was not misplaced, although he did not live long enough to see the profound effects of his actions. The One God had demanded of Agulda that all should yield to the faith, by whatever means. Agulda employed his remarkable energy and charisma well, organising the first of many holy crusades. By the time of his death in 3041 he had recorded

ideal. The practicalities of managing such an enormous realm put an end to expansionist dreams at this point however, and the empire remains encircled by small states, principalities and tribal confederacies established in the wake of the One-War. It has never managed to regain all the territory once held by the Protectorate of the Great River, and in particular does not extend north along the river's shores or east to the coast of the Scarlet Sea. It is, however, by far the largest civilised empire on the face of Korin-Thar.

Politics. The Teleb Empire is divided into 14 provinces or sultanates and is immensely culturally and economically diverse. At the top of the power structure sits the emperor, exercising direct control over the prime sultanate (located around the Crescent Sea). His agents are sent further afield to monitor the activities of the various

sultans, appointed officials who rule at their own courts in the 13 provincial sultanates. In particular, the emperor's agents collect a population tithe, a single yearly payment toward the royal coffer from each province based upon the reported population size. The local sultans employ their own civil services and militaries, and generally operate with a considerable degree of autonomy. This is often problematic, particularly when a sultan has come to view his sultanate as his by right, and finds his choice of successor challenged by the emperor. Consequently, minor rebellions are fairly common. The emperor's armies are officially maintained for the purposes of spreading the faith abroad and offering support to those provinces at the borders of the empire in the face of foreign threat. In reality, they operate to enforce his will within the empire and keep the peace. The entire system is fairly corrupt and inefficient, such that the modern empire now appears fat and self-obsessed rather than as the lean political embodiment of an expansionist religion.

The military potential of the empire is immense, but rarely since its early expansionist phase has this potential been realised. The emperor maintains a standing army and navy, as do most of the provincial sultans, but they also rely heavily on the hire of mercenary companies in times of war. Across most of the empire there is a socially important division between freemen and slaves, but slaves are often able to obtain positions of respect, particularly as civil servants. Nowhere is this more evident than in the military, where the hardened core of each standing army is provided by the *immortals*, professional slave troops who receive excellent treatment in the service of their overlords. Immortal troops are introduced to their units as boys and undergo an impressive military training. Traditionally, young boys captured from the barbarian tribes living on the Savannah to the south and Steppes to the west provide the best stock for swelling the immortals' ranks. It is also traditional to offer freeman status to any immortal whose unit has been decimated in the service of their owner, although many prefer to remain slaves and join another unit instead.

Religion. Worship of Anute, the One God, is ubiquitous in the Teleb Empire. The faith is monotheistic and exclusive; the existence of other Gods is simply denied (and treated as heresy if publicly proclaimed). Foreigners' faiths are respected as long as they do not attempt to preach within the empire's borders, a crime that is punished with state-enslavement (effectively becoming a slave to the emperor) or, in extreme cases, beheading. The extensive clergy are intimately involved with the state, as it is they who exercise judicial power across the empire in their temple courts. This generalised system of religiously-ordained law provides one of the empire's few genuine unifying factors. The clergy do not wear special dress, but wear their hair braided to one side and bear the mark of Anute upon their foreheads, an eye upon the palm of a hand.

The Anutan faith (blue in game terms) espouses unity and cohesion, charity and social responsibility, lawfulness and respect, and learning and wisdom as the four highest virtues. Each wall of its many pyramidal temples is dedicated to one of these four virtues, the cornerstones of the faith. Most of the clergy are occupied guiding the

laity in twice-weekly worship and attending to legal matters. Additionally, a specific sub-group live in isolated communities, attempting to refine religious (and therefore legal) understanding through intense study of the early texts and subsequent church canons. These men and women are known as the Northern Order, because the north wall in a temple of Anute represents the virtue of learning and wisdom. Followers of Anute believe in a joyous afterlife for the faithful, with those who fall short in their worship and worldly deeds condemned to an unhappy reincarnation. Non-believers may in some cases achieve mere reincarnation, but are generally damned to relive the moment of their death for all eternity.

Other powers. There are few other major powers in the Teleb Empire besides local rulers and landowners, their various militaries and the clergy. There is a well established guild system, and merchants, particularly those in the slave trade, are often extremely wealthy here as everywhere. However, few are so mighty that they would be considered real political heavyweights.

Peoples. The Teleb Empire unites people of considerably different racial stocks. To the north, skin colour is generally heavily tanned but undeniably light, with skin tone darkening through central Teleb regions and reaching a leathery brown in the far south. Light clothing is generally preferred against the heat, with airy robes often being favoured over tight fitting tunics and hose. Beards are quite commonly worn in the north, with broad moustaches being more usual further south. Dark hair (usually black) is far more common than blond, particularly in the south, where red is a great rarity. The common tongue is spoken across the empire. Three scripts are widely used, with Elven predominating in the north, and Reyaldric in the east, but the majority of the literate population using the Bovdoran character set.

Trade, climate and demographics. Trade is vibrant across the Teleb Empire, with the area's geographical diversity giving rise to a great range of raw materials and foodstuffs. For the international market, the empire produces almost all of the world's silk in its central and southern sultanates. Precious, and particularly semi-precious stones are also found here in abundance, as are a variety of spices (such as pepper) widely sought out in other cultures.

The climate of the empire is again extremely variable from north to south. In the north, warm temperate weather is the norm (above 30° C in the summer months). The climate becomes more tropical the further south one travels; the far south is dominated by monsoons and a long dry season, becoming stifling in the late summer (often reaching 50° C). The empire covers an immense geographical region, and has a population to match; of an estimated 13 million freemen and 11 million slaves, the vast majority are employed in agriculture.

Cities. Situated on the river Gonda, Aguldaxia is the imperial capital. Only a few centuries old, the city has nonetheless grown apace and boasts numerous impressive features. Perhaps the two greatest are the prime temple of Anute, probably the largest humanoid-made building in

the world, and the emperor's palace complex, a mighty red sandstone structure that is, even by Teleb standards, hideously ostentatious in its massive use of gold and precious stones. The entire city is intended as a tribute to Anute, and is built around an ingeniously planned system of concentric square- and diamond-shaped roads that does surprisingly little to ease the constant street-trader-fuelled congestion.

Teleb is an ancient port city, built largely in sandstone with a proud history. These days it serves as the most important place of pilgrimage in the empire, a service city afforded a profound religious respect. The largest monastic complex belonging to the Northern Order is situated here. In fact, while the empire has numerous coastal cities, few of them play a major part in anything but internal trade, as the Western Ocean is extremely capricious and the rocky Dragon's Teeth isles form an effective barrier against coast-hugging shipping.

Of the numerous other sultanate capitals and centres of trade within the empire, only one further will be singled out for particular mention. Its name is Helvis, a great sprawling city to the far south west that lives off the slave trade, particularly as fuelled by the intra-tribal wars of the Southern Steppes and Savannah. Slaving parties do penetrate these great barbarian territories in search of victims, but in general slaves are purchased from victorious tribal groups eager to profit from their prisoners of war. Helvis is a tough, near lawless city ruled by merchants and money. A den of gambling, vice and iniquity, its near continuous gladiatorial games are famous throughout the empire.

Available occupations. All human occupations except: Hoplite, knight, ninja, samurai, shaman (northern), shaman (southern), tribesman, viking.

2.5 The Southron Empire

History. The Southron Empire is somewhat unusual among the major civilised kingdoms of Korin-Thar, in that it developed in near isolation from the wider world for the first 500 years or so of its history. The end of this period of isolation, occurring in the late 28th century ER, was fairly rapidly followed by the advent of the One-War. This fact goes some way towards explaining the empire's continued distrust of foreigners and pervading air of superiority.

Unlike most of Korin-Thar's human sedentary civilisations, which developed to a greater or lesser extent under the influence of the Elven and later Dwarven model, the region occupied by the present day Southron Empire spontaneously settled to an agricultural lifestyle around the beginning of the 22nd century ER. The early political set-up is not well documented, but some sort of limited central organisation was in place by the time the area (approximately half the size of the modern empire) became attractive to a warlike tribe known as the Southrons. Dwelling on the very borders of the Great Southern Desert, the Southrons were relatively sophisticated for a nomadic culture, possessing for example their own script. They were also extremely hardy and deeply loyal to the tribe, both qualities forged by a need to compete for extremely limited resources (particularly natural springs and the like) with the Orcish tribes of the desert. When they turned their attentions to the settled north in the late 23rd century ER they found a people softened by sedentary living and incapable of offering a unified resistance. Six military victories in 14 years left the Southrons in complete control of the area. They divided the land among their constituent family groups, with a continued loyalty to their chief-made-emperor, and lived as lords over a numerically far superior conquered population.

The empire they had created developed in splendid isolation for another 500 years, knowing only the brutal tribesmen of the Savannah to the north and the Orcish desert folk to the south. It resisted the threat these uncivilised peoples posed with vigour, fortifying the north-eastern border in particular against the savannah's savages with a chain of imposing stone fortresses. The empire also expanded, growing eastwards as far as the barren, windswept hills that blockade the approach to the Salt Sea, and westwards towards the coast. Finally, its isolation was broken when Southron ivory hunters on the Savannah began to come into contact with their counterparts from the southern provinces of the Protectorate of the Great River (the savannah having shrunk considerably in the 26th to 28th century under the pressure of the Protectorate's population expansion). Trade with the wider world slowly began, then almost immediately halted in the aftermath of the One-War, but has now regained its initial, limited scope.

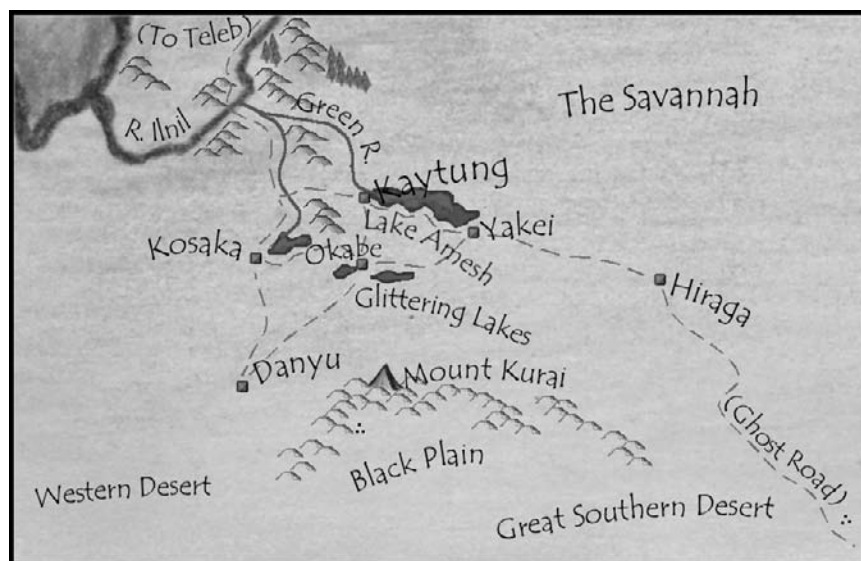
Politics. The Southron Empire is loosely feudal in structure. Originally, members of the Southron warrior elite were the only people permitted to bear arms. However, this tradition slowly declined, particularly given the value of population levies when facing external threat, such that now the descendants of these tribal conquerors are singled out by their right to bear the honorific sword of

rank (katana). These nobles are the samurai; they are grouped into clans, with each clan being descended from an original Southron family grouping. Samurai are extremely loyal to their clan, receiving payment in kind (a share of the produce of the peasantry in an allocated section of the clan's land) in exchange for unlimited military service. Intermarriage between clans is widespread and helps to cement political friendships; the female party is expected to leave her clan and take up residence with her new husband. Movement upwards to samurai status is virtually impossible in Southron society, but one can lose this status by being unable to fulfil one's military obligations to the clan. As samurai must provide their own armour and weapons, as well as those of their retinue, and maintain themselves on campaign, a family that subdivides its

after their deaths and to offer regular sacrifices (usually flowers) in appreciation of their wisdom. One's position in the heavenly court will therefore very much reflect one's position in Southron society, as larger shrines to more esteemed individuals (e.g. clan heads) are visited by all those who would expect to gain from their heavenly beneficence. Emperors, of course, have the largest and most widely visited shrines; it is commonly held that an emperor is the living embodiment of one of his forefathers, an avatar (God in a mortal guise) walking the physical world for the benefit of his people.

A small priesthood, existing on voluntary donations upholds this religious system. They espouse important societal values such as respect for the clan and one's social superiors and an acceptance of the ordained world structure.

In game terms, they are grey (structure and conformity). They do not hold regular services, but are available to provide instruction in the appropriate ceremony when establishing and honouring shrines, and also counselling on moral matters. It is held that the ancestors (Gods) do not directly meddle in world events, and cannot be appealed to for such intervention. Rather, the universe operates according to basic principles that are eternal, deterministic (in the sense of following the logic of cause and effect) and ultimately explicable. This mechanistic worldview is reflected in Southron society, where scientific explanations are widely sought, and art and technology tend



allotted lands too often risks losing its samurai status. Hence younger sons are sometimes sent away as ronin, wandering samurai in search of a new lord willing to allot them land for martial heroism. Failure to find a new lord results in impoverishment and eventual disenfranchisement.

All the clans are loyal to the person of the emperor, the lord of the imperial clan, who can demand of them unlimited military service for imperial defence, or up to three years in any ten-year period for foreign campaign. While the lands controlled by his clan are not excessive, he is assured in his position by an exclusive right to appoint ministers to control the empire's various cities, gaining considerable disposable income from direct and indirect taxation in these regions. In fact, loyalty and service are so ingrained in Southron culture that the emperor's position or preferred succession plan is rarely challenged. The imperial clan has changed only twice in the empire's long history, with both occasions arising from particularly inept imperial rule and spawning lengthy civil wars.

Religion. Southron theology focuses upon a heavenly court to which all people will eventually ascend, a sort of spiritual palace. One's position within the court is cemented by the degree of remembrance one is accorded on the physical plane. A well-positioned head of family will of course look out for other family members when they eventually join him. For this reason, it is customary to erect shrines to important members of the household

to be intertwined. The Southrons have a great knowledge and love of clockwork, for example, tending to employ the technology for the creation of intricate and beautiful moving sculptures and the like.

Developing out of the general Southron theological system, but to a certain degree at odds with it, are the writings of Hwen Kun, a 26th century ascetic dwelling in the east of the Southron Empire. He downplayed the relevance of the ancestors, focussing on the machine metaphor for the universe, and suggested a single underlying principle fundamental to the continued existence of mortal kind: *the balance*. Hwen posited that the productive energy that oils the natural processes going on all around us emerges from an ongoing conflict between all polar opposites, most notably the cardinal qualities of good and evil. While a higher consciousness can be obtained by coming to recognise the underlying unity of these opposites, it is essential to recognise the desirability of the balance and attempt to maintain it. When Korin-Thar is in equilibrium, mental processes across world society as a whole are fluid, whereas a predominance of one opposite on a world-wide scale will tend to undermine creativity and leave mortals stilted and at risk of spiritual malaise. Hwen established an isolated monastic order sworn to serve and understand the balance through meditation and direct action (warrior monks in game terms). These shaven-headed men and women travel widely, attempting to serve the balance as best they can. The order has limited mass religious appeal, but is officially tolerated and has now spread far and wide, estab-

lishing isolated temple communities in all the major human empires and kingdoms.

Other powers. The position of the mercantile classes is not well defined in Southron society, but their voices tend to be heard by the town and city authorities who conduct government on the emperor's behalf in the imperial urban protectorates. Additionally, in the shadows of Southron society lurk the ninja clans, groups of highly trained assassins who, while officially outlawed, perform important espionage functions for powerful and visibly legitimate patrons.

Peoples. The people of the Southron Empire are black skinned, and often a little shorter than other human racial groups. Hair colour is almost always black, with relatively little body hair. Men favour long moustaches, while both men and women crop their hair very short or tie it back in a single ponytail. Upper class clothing tends to be extremely ornate in terms of embroidered patterning, while peasant garb is minimal and loose given the prevailing heat, with broad-rimmed conical hats providing shade from the sun. There are virtually no non-humans living in the empire, where the common tongue is spoken ubiquitously. The only script in regular use is the Southron character set.

Trade, climate and demographics. While internal trade is vibrant, the empire has a relatively limited foreign trade. In particular, it imports virtually nothing, refusing to believe the wider world offers anything of real interest, and places strict limitations on the quality of the goods that may be exported (the best being retained for home consumption). Major exports are tea (which is produced nowhere else), ivory (plundered from the savannah) and novel items of technology such as miniature fountains and clockwork fans.

The Southron climate is unbearably hot to those living in more temperate climes, with a very limited seasonal change in temperature, always above 40° C. The region is inhabitable only by virtue of a combination of geographical oddities (a regular oceanic swell and an unusual prevailing wind). The resultant once-yearly torrential downpour, provided by airflow from the western ocean, lasts around two months. The fields are deeply flooded at this time of year, then slowly dry until harvest time. The empire is bounded by desert to the south, grasslands to the north, and rocky, treacherous and largely uninhabitable hills to the east and west (the rain is not absorbed here, so agriculture is impossible). It has a population of around 10 million, mostly peasant farmers.

Cities. Most of the empire's cities are relatively ancient, primarily because clans tend to severely discourage the emergence of new urban settlements on their land, knowing that they will inevitably have to be ceded to imperial control. There are no ports in this landlocked state, but many cities are built on the banks of the empire's numerous lakes, the only reliable sources of water towards the end of the monsoon-dominated year. The largest city is the capital, Kaytung, built where the immense Lake Amesh that dominates the central Southron plane empties into the Green River. The royal palace is light and airy,

staggering in its use of ivory for decoration, and notable for housing many fountains of great ingenuity and beauty.

Available occupations. All human occupations except: Assassin, gladiator, hoplite, immortal, knight, shaman (northern), shaman (southern), tribesman, viking.

2.6 Tribesmen of the Southern Steppes

History. Since the beginning of the Dark Years the Southern Steppes have been occupied by numerous tribes of nomads. Originally hunter-gatherers like their western neighbours on the savannah, the peoples of this massive area took to a pastoral lifestyle during the Tranquil Years, driving herds of semi-domesticated mammals (sheep, buffalo, horses etc.) on a regular migration about the steppes. For this purpose they became expert horsemen, coming to depend heavily upon their mounts in all aspects of their lives. The nomads do not wander at random, but rather move between specific seasonal grazing areas that belong to a given tribe and are often the object of intra-tribal disputes. There is no written history here, but rather a rich oral tradition of spirit-dominated legends. Where the nomads appear in the histories of the agrarian cultures they border, it is as savage and regular raiders, plundering the wealth of the civilisations to their north (Central City States) and west (the small kingdoms bordering the Teleb Empire).

Politics. The people of the steppes exist in large tribal confederacies, respecting the chief (khan) as the arbitrator of disputes and war leader. Typically, these nomadic folk live their everyday lives in an extremely scattered state, small extended family groups living and working together. They drive their herds in a near continuous migration, taking their lives with them as they move. Tribal leaders stand out by virtue of the size of their herds and retinues and their access to the shamans, the spiritual authorities for tribal culture. Succession is often challenged, but basically progresses according to the ladder principle; the most senior representative of the eldest generation within the ruling family assumes the mantle of khan. Hence succession rarely passes from father to son, but more often from brother to brother or uncle to nephew. The system is complicated by the question of whether seniority depends purely upon age, or also reflects the status of the mother (most wealthy nomadic men having numerous wives).

Family heads are summoned to attend tribal gatherings on a relatively infrequent basis, usually when war parties are being gathered to resolve intra-tribal disputes or raid sedentary neighbours. All males in steppe culture own weapons of war; they are responsible for the immediate protection of their families and must also answer the tribal summons to war. For this reason tribal cultures can gather large armies relative to the total population, with all able-bodied males fighting. The population that can be supported by a given land area is far smaller than that of an equivalent agrarian civilisation, however, so in absolute terms their numerical military capacity does not greatly exceed that of equivalently sized sedentary kingdoms. They are brutal and fearless warriors operating entirely as a light cavalry and making particular use of the powerful recurve bow. Their tactics are generally rudimentary but effective; a charge to within bow range and the unleashing of a volley of arrows is followed by rapid retreat out of the range or returning fire. Each mounted archer usually maintains numerous mounts to ensure a fresh horse for rapid mobility on subsequent charges. The tribesmen of the

steppes are generally more interested in plunder than serious territorial acquisition, except when occasionally united under a particularly ambitious leader. Thankfully for their settled neighbours, their limited knowledge of siege warfare generally lets them down on these occasions.

Religion. Steppe religion is shamanic. All things are said to have spirits that accompany them and, in the case of animals and people, endure beyond their deaths. In the case of natural elements and forces, spirits are often cruel, vengeful and capricious (the weather spirits being particularly feared) but can sometimes be appeased through sacrifice and worship. The spirits of the dead can offer advice on how this appeasement is best achieved, through the medium of the shaman, a highly respected religious figure who can commune with spirits and travel their world. In order to ensure the happiness and comfort of a person's spirit, their bodies are usually preserved for burial and surrounded by their most valued possessions, which will still be useful to them as wandering spirits. The spirits of the dead will wander further and further, such that eventually even the shamans can no longer hear them and they pass beyond the mortal plane entirely.

The shamans themselves are powerful figures, usually operating as close advisors to the tribal khans. They prognosticate upon the meanings of natural events, commune with the spirits, and offer powerful magic to the tribe in times of danger and conflict. A given khan will generally have a head shaman as his closest advisor, but may have many more such figures at his court. Within steppe culture, the shamans often travel among the scattered family groups to offer advice and seek out those with shamanic talent for apprenticeship. They also have a special role in the production of weaponry, their creations being spiritually blessed.

Other powers. None.

Peoples. The people of the steppes are of hardy stock, toughened by their demanding nomadic lifestyle. They tend to be muscular and wiry in frame, with black hair prevailing, usually worn in ponytails. Beards are uncommon, moustaches a little less so. Their skin is ochre in shade and well suited to extremes of temperature. Clothing is functional, with trousers and tunics favoured for ease of horse riding, and armour is generally light. No non-humans are found among them.

Trade, climate and demographics. Despite their savage tendencies, the tribesmen of the steppes do conduct trade with their sedentary neighbours on a limited scale, particularly for steel weapons and clothing (their alternative method of gaining these commodities being raiding). Their primary export is of course livestock, providing meat and mounts for the settled world. The climate of the steppes is hot-temperate, with temperatures in excess of 30° C being common in the summer months. The region appears lightly hilly, but gently ascends to a considerable altitude (around 4000 meters) without seeming outwardly mountainous. Dominated by tall grasslands and subject to an extremely regular and cruel prevailing wind from the east, it can be surprisingly inhospitable, home to great packs of savage wolves. This vast area, descending

and transforming gradually into the savannah to the south west, supports a population of around two million people, with innumerable more livestock.

Cities. The steppes boast no permanent cities.

Available occupations. Tribesman, shaman (southern), apothecary

2.7 Tribesmen of the Savannah

History. The savannah once stretched considerably further to the north and west, and has since the early Dark Years hosted a large tribal population. The inhabitants of this region have altered their lifestyles relatively little since earliest times, typically living as hunter-gatherers around a relatively permanent village community. The economy has become slightly more mixed over the years, with the limited introduction of pastoralism (animal herding) and even small-scale agriculture, but the implementation of these systems is very patchy, and remains of secondary importance. The most significant change to the region came in the 26th to 28th centuries ER, with the expansion of the Protectorate of the Great River slowly bringing much of the northern savannah under the plough. Needless to say this encroachment occurred in the face of tribal hostility, but the failure of the region's occupants to mount a united defence at this time facilitated civilisation's advance. The peoples of this region are fierce warriors, but lack tactical cohesiveness and discipline. They make regular raids to the north and south (now the Teleb and Southron empires) but are generally just a nuisance, offering little real threat of conquest.

Politics. The people of the savannah live in tribal confederacies of variable size, although the everyday business of survival is generally conducted at the level of the village, a rather smaller unit consisting of ten to twenty extended family groupings. Each village will have a single leader to arbitrate disputes and offer leadership in times of war. The position is not strictly speaking hereditary, although it will often pass from father to son. Rather, a chief can be challenged to defend his position in single combat at any time. While this practice might lead to a series of rapid, bloody successions, in reality tribal customs and social pressures tend to make challenges quite uncommon, such that respected elderly chiefs do not find themselves constantly usurped by more youthful, vigorous competitors. Numerous villages belong to a particular tribe, a unit that gains real importance only when territorial disputes require large-scale military confrontations. In these cases, a single war leader is elected from among the various village chiefs constituting the confederacy. Like all tribal cultures, all males bear arms in savannah society, and are ready to defend their tribal rights whenever necessary. They do so as an undisciplined light infantry, bearing spears, shields, short bows and the like. Intra-tribal disputes are common, as are raids to capture land and women or simply gain honour in war.

Religion. Religion on the savannah is shamanic; the section on religion for the tribesmen of the steppes should be consulted for more details. Typically, each village will have a single shaman, a respected advisor to the chief, who will chose a single apprentice from among the village youth.

Other powers. None.

Peoples. The people of the savannah are tough; they have to be to survive their demanding lifestyles. They

tend to be muscular and broad shouldered in frame, often a little shorter than other humans. Black hair prevails, usually cut very short. Beards are reasonably common, moustaches less so. Their skin is dark, nearly black in shade and well suited to a hot climate. Clothing is light, with wrap-like robes, sandals and loincloths common. Armour too is generally light. No non-humans live among them.

Trade, climate and demographics. The only real trade with the civilised nations to the north and south is in slaves. These are particularly sought after in the Teleb Empire; those unfortunates captured in intra-tribal disputes are sold off, primarily in exchange for steel weapons and alcohol. The savannah has a tropical climate, with extreme rainy seasons (monsoons) and a summer temperature that often exceeds 40° C. Unlike the steppes that ascend to the north and east, it is inhabited by a great variety of undomesticated herbivores and carnivores (in particular, big cats and ivory-bearing elephants and rhinoceroses). Around three-quarters of a million tribespeople make their homes here.

Cities. The savannah has no permanent cities.

Available occupations. Tribesman, shaman (north-ern).

2.8 Tribesmen of the Dark Jungle

History. Darkwood has not always had such a cruel reputation for dangerous magics. These potent and widely feared forces, a hangover from the great release of arcane energies at the culmination of the One-War, enchant the forest with bewildering powers to mutate and mystify. In truth, however, it has always been a place strange and terrifying to outsiders, yet intimate and nurturing to those with the knowledge to make their homes there. One such folk comprise those tribal groupings who live at this vast territory's south-western extremity, where southern heat has turned wood to jungle. Since the Dark Years these folk have pursued a virtually unchanged lifestyle, living as hunter-gatherers, exploiting the jungle's rich bounty while respecting its many dangers. The relatively recent magical influx has done little except enrich their already complex oral mythology. Their contact with the outside world has always been minimal and they remain among the most isolated societies on Korin-Thar.

Politics. The jungle tribesmen live in permanent villages, which are of variable size but rarely exceed fifteen or twenty extended family groupings. They are fiercely territorial, specialising in ambush-style warfare and making particular use of the blowpipe, assisted by the jungle's rich offering of poisons. More conventional tribal weaponry, such as spears and light shields, are employed for hand-to-hand skirmishes. Raiding is common, primarily to capture women, but also as a right of passage to manhood for the young braves.

Each village is ruled by a single chief, usually a hereditary position passing from father to son. Chiefs lead from the front however, so familial changes precipitated by death without an adult heir are common (a child who has not passed to manhood cannot claim his father's title). Chiefs take advice from the various family heads, and also from the shaman (witchdoctor), who holds a particularly influential position.

Religion. Religion in the jungle is shamanic; the section on religion for the tribesmen of the steppes should be consulted for more details. Typically, each village will have a single witchdoctor who chooses one apprentice from among the village youth.

Other powers. None.

Peoples. The people of the dark jungle are generally of fairly slight build, often a little shorter than other humans. Black hair prevails, although this is rarely apparent as the tribesmen tend to shave their heads and tattoo their scalps with fearsome images. Beards are quite uncommon, moustaches never worn. Their skin is dark, nearly black in shade and well suited to a hot climate. Clothing is light, often nothing more than a loincloth and foot wraps, although jewellery (bone and wood) is very common. Armour too is generally light. Few non-humans are found here.

Trade, climate and demographics. The peoples of this region are almost entirely isolated from the outside

world; there is virtually no external trade. The jungle has a tropical climate, with ferocious rainy seasons (monsoons) and a summer temperature that often exceeds 40° C. With the constant humidity that prevails, this makes the region incredibly unpleasant for most outsiders. It does not, however, dissuade a breathtaking variety of flora and fauna from making its home here; the jungle host myriad strange and exotic species. Around a quarter of a million tribespeople make their homes here.

Cities. The jungle has no permanent cities.

Available occupations. Tribesman, shaman (northern).

2.9 Tribesmen of the Northern Wastes

History. The Northern Wastes present a barren and unattractive image to the civilised world. The interior of this cruel land mass is inhabited by a sparse population of genuinely savage tribesmen, and the limited appeal of these rocky highlands in combination with their inhabitants' bloodthirsty resilience has left the region largely untouched by the expansionist desires of civilised nations. Those who make their homes here do so as hunter-gatherers, without pastoralism or agriculture to ease their quest after sustenance. They live their lives in competition with tribes of Orcs and a host of cruel predators. It is not surprising that their limited culture is transmitted in oral epics that celebrate warrior virtues devoid of compassion or honour in the civilised sense. This vicious environment has spawned an amoral, machiavellian and pitiless society.

Politics. The tribesmen of the interior form loose political associations at the level of the village, a non-permanent settlement that will tend to exploit a given area in a hack and burn manner before shifting on to a new location. A typical village consists of twenty or so extended family groupings, dominated by a single chief. There is little in the way of an established succession principle; a chief rules until he is too weak to defend his position, at which point he is brutally dispossessed by some new contender. The chief makes decisions about the groups' movements and leads from the front in the regular inter-tribal conflicts that erupt. He does not act as an arbiter of disputes, which are settled by intra-tribal combat between families, there being no real sense of law here. Feuds are commonplace, lasting generations. One tradition that is generally maintained, however, is the chief's right of access to all tribal women, even if he does not himself maintain them as wives. Needless to say, this is a powerful motivating principle to those who might challenge for this leading position.

Religion. Religion on the Northern Wastes is shamanic; the section on religion for the tribesmen of the steppes should be consulted for more details. Typically, a given shaman lives separately from any particular tribe along with his apprentices. Multiple tribes will visit and make use of a given shaman, providing him with protection and offerings in exchange for his knowledge and magic. Usually, a shaman will have his dwelling protected by a single warrior from each tribe that seeks his affiliation. The shaman is a near universally respected figure.

Other powers. None.

Peoples. The tribesmen inhabiting the interior of the Northern Wastes are unusually large and heavily built, with powerful musculatures and heavy set, indelicate features. Brown hair prevails, although red is also relatively common, usually worn long and forming natural dreadlocks. Beards are standard among the men. Clothing is rudimentary and functional, usually fur, while skin colour is light. Most tribesmen carry spears and wooden shields, with stone hand axes making a standard secondary armament.

Trade, climate and demographics. The tribesmen of the wastes have virtually no non-violent contact with more civilised folk, although a few of the more settled tribes do trade fur in exchange for steel arms and alcohol. The climate of the interior is harsh, owing partly to the region's northerly latitude, partly to its hilly altitude (not mountainous, but unforgiving rocky terrain) and partly to the action of a cold prevailing northerly wind. Winter temperatures often drop to -10°C or even lower. Around a quarter of a million tribesmen inhabit this brutal region.

Cities. The Northern Wastes have no permanent cities.

Available occupations. Tribesman, shaman (northern).

2.10 The Viking Kingdoms

History. The Viking Kingdoms occupy a near unique place among the many cultures of Korin-Thar, bridging the gap between civilised states and tribal confederacies. While the interior regions of the Northern Wastes have from time immemorial been home to tribesmen, the coastal regions, extending further south, have hosted a succession of settlers. Initially home to disparate Wolven colonial settlements established in the Dream Years, the area was conquered piecemeal by the High Elves in the Battle and Dark Years. It remained in Elven hands until the early Tranquil Years, when, as Elven power waned, those tribal elements closer to the bountiful coast slowly overran the Elven colonies and established their own semi-agrarian societies. While maintaining many of their tribal customs, these people turned to agriculture and the sea for food. Indeed, the sea became their major outlet as fearsome Viking raiders, while their increased organisation allowed them to offer effective unified resistance against further waves of invading inland tribesmen. There are currently nine Viking Kingdoms along the coast of the Northern Wastes, each a thorn in the side of the more civilised nations whose shipping and coastal territories they plunder. Their raiding is near perpetual, but combat remains small scale, with major military engagements being the exception and little in the way of a genuine strategy of conquest or expansion.

Politics. While the nine Viking Kingdoms are fiercely independent, fighting regular minor wars with one another, they share similar customs and political traditions. Their warfare is usually inspired by issues of prestige rather than territorial disputes. An elaborate system has developed whereby each kingdom pays theoretical homage to, or is paid homage by, each of the other kingdoms. This produces an intricate web-like structure of prestige relations, reflected in the payment of annual fealty in money or kind. The particular payment between each kingdom is decided by the outcome of their most recent military engagement, such that when one kingdom inflicts a crushing defeat it is in the position to impose a large tax on the loser. When a kingdom refuses to pay, a new war is waged and payment conditions re-established. As most of the kingdoms have some such arrangement with each of the other kingdoms and the overall balance of payments tends to shift every campaigning season, the overall pattern of prestige links is extremely fluid. It is also often contradictory, such that one kingdom may be paying homage to another kingdom which in turn pays homage to one of the original kingdom's tributaries.

Within each individual kingdom, power is most obviously exercised at the level of the village. Each village forms a self-sufficient community under a single war chief, whose position is hereditary. Vikings are not entirely undifferentiated in profession like their tribal forefathers, but rather there is some specialisation of activities. However, as well as maintaining a farm or business of some sort, every Viking man is also a warrior, owing once yearly seasonal combat service to his chief. The right (and duty) to bear arms separates freemen from slaves and is held in great worth. Typically, each village maintains a single long

ship for raiding. When the men are on campaign in the summer, their women and youths maintain the village.

The village chiefs in turn must answer the summons of their kings, the king being effectively the most powerful village chief within a realm, often occupying a fortified settlement on the mote and bailey model. The king's position too is hereditary, although usurpation of a particular royal line is relatively common. The king will summon most of his men to his aid when waging war against other Viking Kingdoms or defending the realm against outside attack. In those years when he does not summon his host, the individual war chiefs are free to raid abroad as they see fit. The king also has a right to limited taxation, primarily to balance the royal budget against the inter-Viking-Kingdom payment of fealty. A popular king is one who has no need to tax, because he receives more than he must pay out, but at the same time calls upon his war-chiefs irregularly enough that they can plunder the wealth or the rich civilised nations overseas.

Religion. While relatively close in outlook to the tribes of the interior, the Vikings have progressed from shamanic beliefs towards a coherent polytheism supported by a rich mythology and folklore. Members of their pantheon typically developed as personifications of the more powerful spirits previously worshipped hereabouts. Under the influence of numerous inspired true priests and story tellers/bards these spirits became Gods, believed once to have inhabited the mundane world, but now conducting their business in the shade-world of the valiant beyond the great ice wall to the north. Here they are joined by the souls of the brave, who win the honour of fighting the Gods' battles for them in the afterlife.

While there are numerous Gods gaining some degree of worship here, they broadly fall into two military camps, those following Rondrill and those who fight for Gavanic. Rondrill and Gavanic were brothers, but Rondrill was of the Earth and Gavanic was of the sky, and they could only be at peace when bathing in the ocean, their mother. Rondrill was mighty, but Gavanic was full of guile. Gavanic envied his brother's dominion over the peoples of the world and tricked him into imprisonment behind the ice wall. Gavanic now guards the mythical Gates of the north against his brother's onslaught in an eternal war. Ultimately, Rondrill will be victorious, his return to the mortal south hailing the end of the world. This event will be preceded by Gavanic's slaughter and his mother's death from grief, at which point the sea will cease in its offerings of sustenance.

Most Vikings worship both Rondrill and Gavanic, and their respective Godly hosts. Village priests (the backbone of Viking theology) tend to worship one or the other, while encouraging respect for both. Rondrill represents the warrior virtues, bravery, humour, lustfulness and camaraderie. His priests are red in game terms. Gavanic represents quick witted and fluid thought, cunning, ruthlessness and trickery. His priests are black in game terms. Rondrill is most commonly depicted as a bearded, winged warrior, while Gavanic most often appears as a blind man (the deception with which he ensnared his brother by exploiting his charity). Priests in Viking society tend to take a single apprentice, and dress simply, in functional clothing and furs. They act more as transmitters of oral folk

tales and tenders of the sick than as the elaborate practitioners of ritual spectacle.

Other powers. None.

Peoples. Viking men are generally of stocky, solid build, with brown, blond or red hair worn long, braided, and complimented by a full beard. They dress mostly in furs, and fight most commonly with large round shields (viking rounds) accompanied by axe, sword or spear. Skin colour is light, weathered against the cruel north wind. Literacy is not widespread here, but where it exists the Elven script is usually used, an odd hangover from the days of colonisation.

Trade, climate and demographics. Vikings are raiders and pirates, but they also engage in legitimate trade with more civilised folk, coveting luxury goods in exchange for furs and the like. The scale of external trade is not great, however, although internal trade is fairly vibrant. The climate here is a little less harsh than the inland regions inhabited by tribal groups, being at lower altitude and moderated by the nearby ocean. It is nonetheless bitter in winter and warm at best in summer, being less extreme rather than noticeably more pleasant than the interior. With the widespread acceptance of agriculture, the population of these coastal kingdoms has swelled to around half a million souls.

Cities. Although Viking Kings might like to claim otherwise, their realms boast no real cities, only large fortified market villages.

Available occupations. Apothecary, cartographer, entertainer, farmer, fisherman, hunter, innkeeper, merchant, priest/acolyte, viking.

2.11 High Elves of the Crystal Isle

History. The Crystal Isle is quite simply the oldest civilised state on the face of Korin-Thar. Its establishment was marked by the introduction of the Elven calendar (ER 0). The early Elves felt a powerful affinity for the sea and were from the first best suited to naval warfare. The island was won in a long and bitter confrontation with the dragon lord Zithius and was hailed as a long-awaited paradise, a safe home base protected by the life-giving ocean. It was here that agriculture first re-emerged in the Dream Years as Elven tribalism gave way to monarchy and long-term settlement. The Elves led the way in terms of the establishment of written law and more general cultural advancement, underwritten by a proclivity for trade and a determined militarism. Theirs was the light that lit the north.

Naturally, the end of the first great historical epoch and the shift to the Battle Years was heralded by events on the Crystal Isle. In the late eighth century ER the first great Elven dynasty, the Rçichârees, ran out of heirs. Political events (rule by an ineffective council of state) catalysed a growing undercurrent of discontent that had emerged within Elven society, and the result was civil war. On one side was the majority of the population, supporting those noble families who had been closest to the old royal family. Lined up against them was an unlikely coalition. It was formed in large part from a group of Elves who had begun to heed the teachings of a breakaway religious sect, preaching with great passion throughout the eighth century. While remaining true to much traditional religious teaching, these clerics had begun to find spiritual solace in the beautiful natural world, and resented the island's sterility and isolation. They were joined in a fragile alliance by a camp of militarist nobles and their immediate followers. These soldierly Elves had long been pressing for an expansionist policy of territorial aggrandisement against the mainland, but had found themselves marginalised by a dynasty that favoured an isolationist foreign policy. The two groups made a collective bid for power, but were defeated in a short and bloody civil war that culminated in their banishment. They took ship in 807 towards the northern mouth of the Great River (an event labelled the Great Exodus), soon to become the Wood and Dark Elves respectively.

While initially suffering in the aftermath of the civil war, a new dynasty and a renewed singularity of purpose soon propelled the Crystal Isle into a position of dominance. Ironically, in the Battle and Dark Years this dynasty was to fulfil many of the desires of those militarists who had been banished, setting up numerous colonies on the northern continental coastline. The Dark Years saw the Isle reach its apex in terms of political influence and trade dominance, but the Elves were to lose much to the emerging human states in the Tranquil Years. In the aftermath of the One-War, the Crystal Isle emerged as a state alive with tradition and boasting a great cultural heritage, but no longer an economic leader nor a great military power. Even as a maritime power the High Elves are now challenged by Karivdan commerce and Wolven and Viking piracy. They remain ultimately secure, however, on their island fortress, and have lost little of their well-earned cul-

tural pride.

Politics. The Crystal Isle is an absolute monarchy in which the crown has held onto a great deal of power and influence in the face of an upper class seething with political aspirations. The king (or occasionally queen) has a theoretical mandate to rule at whim, being held entirely above the law. In reality, the power of tradition, as championed by a higher nobility that holds its own best interests very dear, tends to curb the ambitions of the more radical or extreme monarchs. Decisions are made at the royal court, where the monarch is attended by a great number of representatives from among the island's nobility. The nobility tends to form into factions, capable of considerable intrigue in attempts to win the monarch's favour and gain access to policy decisions. At any given time, a monarch will tend to depend upon a few favourites, but the monarch's favour is notoriously fickle. This situation suits absolutist power well; an active and selfish upper class expends its energy clamouring for influence at court, and the king's position is maintained without real opposition. The upper classes who engage in this elaborate and highly ritualised political game are far removed from the mass of Elven society and tend to be superior and condescending. Personal and family honour is assiduously maintained, with quarrels often ending in duels to the death. The real business of ruling is carried out by a relatively efficient civil service, primarily of lower noble origin. The right to levy taxes on the king's behalf is rented to "tax farmers", who fulfil their duties as they see fit (raising a regional tariff established at court) in exchange for a good cut. The nobility themselves are of course exempt from such taxation. These "common" taxes fill the royal coffers and fund the small but efficient standing army. The navy, by contrast, is assembled only in times of need from the merchant fleet, but a tradition of extremely high pay direct from the treasury in combination with a great seafaring pride ensures that this duty is never resented. The resulting force is surprisingly disciplined and effective.

Religion. The High-Elven religion is based on a national (racial) feeling rather than a strong hierarchical church system. Its position is extremely secure, in the sense that virtually all High Elves carry the tenets of their faith with them, but there is little in the way of a centralised religious structure capable of influencing worldly political events. High Elven priests have no temples, but rather wander the land resting each night at the houses of the laity. It is a great honour to be visited by a priest and hosts are usually as generous as they can afford to be when providing hospitality. Most houses have small shrines dedicated to the faith, while the rich typically build larger ones, primarily as status symbols but also as reflections of a genuine widely held religiosity. In exchange for their keep, the priests will often tell stories from the rich Elven mythology preceding the establishment of the Isle as a safe haven, and especially the period before the Elves entered Korin-Thar through one of the elder folk's pools. The only place on the Isle one can be certain of finding a priest is at the Shrine of Stars, the great library and centre of scholarship in the capital, Effêlstatim. The clergy are the traditional custodians of this place, supported from the royal coffers.

The High Elves worship the *Almâri*, or “life essence”, the essential spirit stuff from which all matter is born. This essence both depends upon and spawns the three truths, personified by: Trava, God of continuity and order; Elari, Goddess of change, destruction, regeneration, creativity and progress; and Viickar, God of the viick or “joyous balance”, the attractive force that binds the processes of change and continuity. There is no afterlife as such in Elven religious teaching. Rather, every animate living being (animal) lives a succession of lives, becoming reincarnated in a different form upon the death of a previous incarnation, but retaining the same immortal soul. It is impossible for all but the most enlightened souls to recognise the purpose behind their progression through multiple bodies, and such a journey is certainly not comprehensible in terms of simple mortal concepts such as a particular pre-ordained moral reward system. The Gods Trava and Elari appear repeatedly in Elven mythology in a wide variety of incarnations, from Avatars directly influencing early (pre-pool) history, to flames, trees, rivers and the like. These Gods were particularly active (as both observers and directors of events) in the period when the first childlike proto-elven folk struggled to establish their racial destiny in the faeryland that had given them form. When they came to comprehend the true nature of being (the truth of the *Almâri*) the Elves were reborn into the physical world (via their pool), here to facilitate the *Almâri*'s final destiny. This destiny lies at the end of time, when the great wheel of reincarnation will leave its worldly axle and the contest of change versus continuity will become meaningless. Such a state of being will only come to pass when each individual soul upon Korin-Thar has completed its journey and reached its final state, one of inner peace. In game terms, Elven priests must choose between worshipping Trava (blue) or Elari (Red/white; roll randomly at each new E.P. level obtained to see which colour spells are received). Viickar is always recognised, but never directly worshipped.

Other powers. There is little in the way of a guild system on the Crystal Isle, and no other real organised political associations to challenge the authority of the crown. However, while trade remains mostly the preserve of the lower nobility (in terms of funding and ownership), an emerging middle class increasingly manages industry, often with aspirations towards social improvement.

Peoples. High Elves are physically described in the Hexicon RPG rulebook, section 1.2.2.1. Dress varies considerably, depending upon social position. Commoners tend to wear their hair long in a single braid or cut it short, above the ears. Their clothes are generally loose fitting and functional, with pastel shades preferred. For the nobility, elaborately embroidered and dyed long-tailed coats over tight hose and shirts are preferred by the men, with decorative and flowing gowns employing bustles and corsets favoured by the ladies. Tans or other signs of weathering are generally frowned upon as denoting common birth, so subtle whitening powder and eye makeup is often employed. Noble men wear their hair long and flowing, while ladies wear it up in elaborate styles. Both sexes enjoy wearing decorative hats in a variety of shapes and sizes. Few non-Elves make their homes here, but racial

prejudice is not excessive. Elven is spoken, and the Elven script is employed almost exclusively.

Trade, climate and demographics. Although the Crystal Isle's extreme northerly position implies a cruel climate, the region is the happy recipient of a convenient geographical accident, a prevailing southerly air flow combined with favourable currents from the Great River to the south. For this reason the climate is chilly but far from frigid, with the presence of the sea minimising extremes of climate change and ensuring daytime average temperatures in the range of -5 (winter) to 15 (summer) degrees centigrade. The island supports a population in the region of 1.5 million, mostly farmers and fishermen. Trade is vigorously pursued, with the primary export-producing business being dying; textiles are generally imported, prepared in specialist workshops on a fairly large scale, and re-exported for luxury sale. A strong tradition in leviathan (great northern whale) hunting also feeds foreign demand for these creatures' unique by-products, particularly their unusually coloured tusk ivory. In return, the island's aristocracy demand all the world's rich luxuries.

Cities. Effêlstatim (North Port) is the jewel of the Crystal Isle, the seat of royal power and the oldest inhabited city in the world. Set atop the high chalk cliffs of the northern coast its white marble peaks stand cold and beautiful, housing the great Elven families and millennia of tradition. The city was never a trading centre, but rather a place of security, and is virtually inaccessible by sea, being further ringed on its three inland sides by a great wall built in imposing granite. Among the city's bountiful architectural claims is the royal palace; at its heart is the tallest of the city's spires, surrounded by seven lesser peaks, each connected by intricate walkways that bridge the heavens. Near the palace stands the Shrine of Stars, a great rectangular university building in a mishmash of architectural styles (reflecting its continued growth). It contains probably the greatest collection of assembled writings in the civilised world within its six floors and four deep cellars. The city functions only as the seat of government, so is relatively small, hosting the army and upper nobility (and their support staff) rather than a large mass of the mercantile and commercial classes.

Draffilstatim (South Port) is a city of far greater size and mercantile importance, being the island's major trading port. Its sprawling mass is open to the sea as it meets the island's gentle southern coast, a perfect natural harbour. The city is built upon both sides of the estuary to the river Dormarii, with crossings by ferry or one of three large bridges located inland and away from the main city quarters. It lies close to the island's best agricultural regions, which feed a hungry population, and has a lively and cosmopolitan atmosphere. It is a place of great diversity, not least between rich and poor, and is marked out against the horizon by the tower of flame, a constantly burning spire built in imitation of the royal palace to guide Elven ships to safe harbour.

The Crystal Isle's final settlement of city-like proportions is Havalstatim (West Port), a much younger town which retains a no-nonsense atmosphere, being a centre of fishing activity. In particular, it is from Havalstatim that the whaling ships are launched, a perilous undertaking that

earns their crews great respect and a central place in the Elven navy in times of peril. The provincial nature of the city tends to make foreigners the object of mistrust, but they are generally fairly treated by its proud inhabitants.

Available occupations. HIGH ELVEN: Bard, lord/noble, soldier. HUMAN: Administrator, alchemist, apothecary, assassin, bounty hunter, cartographer, clothier, entertainer, farmer, fisherman, hunter, illusionist, innkeeper, jeweller, locksmith, mercenary, mason, merchant, metalsmith, miller, miner, physician, potter, priest/acolyte, psionic, sailor/pirate, scout, summoner, thief, toymaker, weaponcrafter, wizard, woodcrafter.

2.12 Wood Elves of the Silver Wood

History. Following the civil war and Great Exodus (ER 807) a large body of Elves took ship from the Crystal Isle, exiled to live upon the mainland. The fragile alliance between the militarist camp and those Elves who followed the breakaway religion that had emerged in the seventh and eighth centuries ER soon became strained. The militarists struggled to achieve political ascendancy over their numerically far superior nature-loving brethren, but this group instead turned to their spiritual gurus, who had become known as druids, for leadership. As the enormous migration slowly wound its way upriver from the northern mouth of the Great River, the majority laid eyes upon the Silver Wood to their east and yearned to make their homes therein. In contrast, those proud militarists among the exiles, still smarting from their defeat, had no intention of living like barbarians and animals. Conflict was inevitable, and a leader emerged among the nature lovers: an Elf named Aleviar who lined his people up in a defiant stand. The militarist camp was better organised for war, but outnumbered five to one. Cursing their one-time allies, they abandoned their attempts at leadership and carried on upriver alone. Aleviar grudgingly became the first king of the Wood Elves, leading his people into the Silver Wood and establishing a political order and succession that has remained unbroken to the modern day. The Wood Elves have consistently defended their forest home with great vigour against intrusions, particularly the advances of agrarian settlers, but in truth have had little need to fight major wars, their reputation for bloody-minded guerrilla warfare being rapidly established and long remembered. Their avowed protection of the tiny Hobbit state they border has been extremely significant in ensuring its continued safety, but is an exception; generally the Wood Elves keep themselves to themselves, remaining aloof from worldly politics. This is especially true since the One-War. Executed almost entirely by outsiders, its ravishes still scar their beautiful forest home.

Politics. The Wood Elves live in small clans as hunter-gatherers, careful to maintain and respect the ecological balance of the Silver Wood. A typical village is built among the boughs of the taller trees, connected by vine bridges, and hosts perhaps a hundred family groups. All Wood Elves are equal in a tribal sense, the old and wise receiving assistance from the young within a supportive community. However, each clan has a single hereditary clan head. The clan head and his family are provided for at the expense of the other clan members, and can hence specialise in the skills of leadership, specifically combat knowledge and the administering of justice. Such justice is administered at spontaneously convened courts in the presence of the whole clan. In times of trouble, each adult male provides military service to the clan head, who in turn follows the commands of the Wood Elven monarchs. The hereditary king and queen rule jointly at the capital (in essence just their own clan's village) and receive a small annual tribute from each clan (which is generally redistributed to clans hard hit by famine, pestilence and the like). Each clan additionally sends and supports a single young male to serve in the royal guard until

such time as he is retired, a greatly sought-after privilege. Upon retirement, a new hunter is selected and sent to court, maintaining the size of the royal retinue. The monarchs' power is theoretically absolute, in terms of potentially unlimited military service, but is rarely exercised. Despite their apparently disparate state of living, the Wood Elves are extremely unified, and while their hunter army is not professional, it is the undisputed master of the woody environment it protects.

Religion. Originally, the Wood-Elven religion developed out of the High-Elven faith, a doctrinal variation within the same overall framework. Rather than personifying the processes of change and continuity and their binding force, the druids favoured a single personification of the *Almâri* (life essence) itself, associating it with the spirit of nature. Over time, however, the faiths have diverged. The cycles of destruction and rebirth, tempered by continuity and gradual development, are now seen in terms of the natural world and its seasonal shifts. The spirit of nature has become more firmly embodied in the deity Pharum, often pictured as a hunter (or rather a gamekeeper). The Wood Elves retain their belief in reincarnation, but no longer maintain eschatological expectations; there is no longer an inevitable end to the cycle, nor a highest state to be attained. Additionally, the process by which a new incarnation is arrived at following death is better specified and linked to the moral acts of the individual; progression to a higher state requires a respect for nature, returning what is given with diligence and thanks. The druids in particular are guardians and tenders of nature. They do not worship Pharum, but rather mimic him in tending their groves (the isolated places they make their homes). Druids are perceived to be highly evolved (in terms of the cycle of reincarnation) and their groves are respected as places of great religious importance. They exist apart from the mass of Wood-Elven society, living lives of quiet contemplation, but are sought out for guidance and consultation. They enter villages rarely, usually only to choose a disciple (apprentice), but local clans will tend to know the location of nearby groves and protect them with great vigour.

Other powers. There are no other powers in Wood Elf society.

Peoples. Wood Elves are physically described in the Hexicon rulebook, section 1.2.2.2. There are very few outsiders living among them, for these are a secretive folk. Their dress is simple and functional, mostly leathers or light cloth dyed with natural browns and greens. Hair is usually cropped at ear length for men and worn in braids for women. It is a rare thing to see a male Wood Elf without their favoured weapon, the long bow.

Trade, climate and demographics. The Wood Elves indulge in relatively little external trade, although they do actively seek out metals (which they lack as a raw material), offering good rope, timber (some of it unique) and furs in exchange. All foreign trade is dealt with through the royal household (or rather their specified agents), and is brought to the capital at Elavis. Here, a year-long market is maintained, with representatives from individual

clans coming to do business. The Silver Wood is vast, so a great diversity of natural products exists that can usefully be redistributed to alternative regions. Most goods are bartered, although the royal house maintains money for dealing with foreign merchants. The wood's climate varies considerably from north to south (a distance of around 2500 miles), but is largely temperate, with typical summer temperatures ranging from 15 to 30 degrees centigrade. The region is extremely sparsely populated, supporting around three-quarters of a million Wood Elves.

Cities. There are no real cities here, but the capital, Elavis, deserves mention. It hosts a permanent market, perhaps the most enlivening atmosphere within the entire wood, and also the royal palace. The palace is not grand by civilised standards, but is surely unique. It is made from around twenty great oaks in a circle, which have been tended so as to grow together and entwine at their tops. So complete is their interdependence that they appear to make a solid wall, opening only occasionally at strategic angles for light, ventilation, and defensive positions. The entranceway can be blocked by a rolling stone of immense size and weight. Inside, the original chamber, some sixty feet in diameter and one hundred feet high, has been divided into seven levels, with the highest floor providing the royal bedroom, and the ground floor housing the monarch's thrones. Each of these is exquisitely carved from rare and fragrant wood, adding to the palace's strange magnificence.

Available occupations. WOOD ELVEN: Clanhead, woodsman. HUMAN: Apothecary, druid, entertainer.

2.13 Dark Elves of Dven-Sath

History. Following the Great Exodus (ER 807) and the subsequent dissolution of the fragile alliance between the militarist and druidic camps, the minority (militarist) group continued on past the Silver Wood to seek a more civilised homeland. Their migration to the south saw their numbers further reduced in a prolonged series of skirmishes with non-Elven tribal elements (primarily human and Orcish). The experience galvanised the group; their dire circumstances engendered an increasing tendency towards ruthlessness and brutality. Any who couldn't fend for themselves were simply abandoned en route. Unable to establish an agricultural base in the face of tribal ferocity, the militarists were slowly pushed to the south east over the course of the next century, finally arriving in the barren mountains to the north of the Salt Sea. Here they encountered the Brindar, a Dwarven clan who had made their home beneath these arid southern mountains some five centuries before. While initially hostile, the Brindar soon showed themselves amenable to friendly interaction. Their protection saw the Elves safely to the shores of the Salt Sea, and their charity and willingness to trade facilitated the emergence of a thriving Elven community. Over the course of the next three centuries, Elven numbers grew, their skin adapting to the harsh southern sun to become dark in hue. No longer a sorry, crippled people, they regained their pride and their ambition. Restored to health, however, they tired of fishing the Salt Sea and turned their eyes covetously towards the underground homes and mineral wealth of their one-time benefactors the Brindar. In 1198 ER, under the pretext of a great celebration of brotherhood held upon a specially constructed fleet of rafts, the ruling classes of the Brindar were drowned en masse. Before news of this treachery could reach their mighty fortified underground city, the black-hearted Elves had fallen upon the unsuspecting Brindar population, entering through gates thrown open in friendship and killing the majority in their sleep. The genocide was almost complete, a whole people annihilated in a single night. The Dark-Elven conquerors took their city and sealed themselves beneath its mighty gates. There they have remained ever since, dominating the lands around and about and habitually raiding the nomadic tribes whose territory they border. These night-time raids are conducted with a mindless brutality that is impressive even among the uncivilised recipients of their tender attentions. Dreams of Dark-Elven expansion and conquest have, however, tended to flounder upon an unwillingness to fight pitched battles or consolidate their fleeting victories.

Politics. The Dark-Elven ruling classes are inherently disunited, unable to trust one another or suppress their own ambitions for power. The Dark Elves are obsessed with lineage, and have remained crystallised around the nine major lines that can trace their descent from the original leaders of the militarist camp that left the Crystal Isle so many years before. Rule is officially by council, with a single member of each of the nine great families permitted a place. In reality, very little is decided upon at council. It merely acts as a forum to flex political muscle and identify weakness. Each family controls a large section of Dven-Sath, the Dark-Elven underground city, and

essentially does as it pleases on its own manor, keeping a sizeable court of warriors to enforce the will of the family head, the oldest male. The families gain their income partly from rent, as each family literally owns the majority of the sector it controls. Law is utterly arbitrary, conducted at the whim of the family head. There is no sense of chaos however; a regime of brutality ensures that only those who have no need to fear the wrath of the families (i.e. younger family members) indulge in lawlessness. Dark Elves follow numerous professions, but non-Elven slaves captured during raids do the bulk of the real work. These slaves are kept in sub-humanoid conditions and have an extremely limited life expectancy. Replenishment of slaves necessitates regular raiding and further fills the coffers of the ruling families, as it is they who organise their retinues into hunting parties for the procurement of new bodies.

Religion. The Dark Elves are, on the whole, extremely irreligious. There is no organised religion here and most Dark Elves sneer at the concept of worship. There is a general belief in reincarnation and the immortality of the soul, but the form in which one is reborn is viewed as largely arbitrary. Consequently, death is feared greatly, and the search for immortality is virtually a racial obsession. Unlike most of Korin-Thar, magic is still openly practised in Dven-Sath, with many of the most respected and powerful individuals within the city possessing magical skills. Necromancy (summoning) is especially widely studied and has engendered a particular knowledge of demons and the plane they inhabit. For this reason, perhaps, there are a number of cults dedicated to particular dukes of Hell (demon lords), but these are still a minority attraction within the city, and affiliates view themselves more as negotiators striking a bargain than unthinking servants or devotees. Service here is performed in exchange for tangible rewards and power, not for the promise of life after death or out of moral obligation.

Other powers. With the exception of a handful of particularly powerful mages, who have gained such a degree of respect (or rather instil such a degree of terror) that they can operate independently from the family heads, there are no other powers in Dven-Sath.

Peoples. Dark Elves are physically described in the Hexicon rulebook, section 1.2.2.3. Hair is grown long, usually worn in a single plait for men, or bound up in angular, sculpture-like projections for women. Leather clothing is generally favoured, with elaborately embroidered black or red velvet robes preferred for formal wear. Outsiders would never be accepted as equal here. The free population is entirely Dark-Elven, with other races enduring brief and unpleasant lives as slaves.

Trade, climate and demographics. Despite the fear and hatred that Dark Elves inspire in most parts of Korin-Thar, there are merchants willing to deal with them. The primary luxury good the Dark Elves offer is coffee, which grows nowhere else but their cunningly irrigated mountain ceiling. They also offer a good range of minerals, with many active mines. In return they mainly seek food, for the naturally occurring diet in these regions is extremely limited. While Dven-Sath itself remains fairly cool, the

climate above ground is tropically warm, often exceeding 40 degrees centigrade and rarely dropping below 30. The surrounding region is extremely barren, baked hard by the hot sun; although the Salt Sea offers a relative oasis of marine life, it is half dead in comparison to the ocean proper. The Dark Elves, of whom there are around a quarter of a million, use the Elven script exclusively. They rule a slave population of around a further quarter of a million.

Cities. Dark Elf society is entirely contained within a single city: Dven-Sath. In addition to being one of the most populous cities on Korin-Thar, it is among the most unusual. Set entirely underground, the city is ventilated by a series of thin (two foot diameter) circular tunnels. This network culminates in two enormous shafts, which make contact with the atmosphere at the city's single gate. They rise as two enormous towers, flanking the city entrance. One of the shafts expels the city's smoke, the second draws in fresh air to replace it, powered by massive bellows deep below. Set between them, the gate itself looks like a huge well. Access is by a lift-like pulley system, and is blocked by a great portcullis of iron. Needless to say, these features were built by the Dwarves who once inhabited this place. The city proper is built within the most enormous natural cavern, lit in the Dwarven manner by an intricate series of mirrors that culminate in nine immense reflective pieces set about the city's perimeter at a great height. The cavern is perhaps half a mile high, and maybe three miles across, and is tightly packed with buildings, a particular feature being the many tall thin towers that reach up to the stony heavens. In this sense, the architecture is a reflection of the limited space available. Around the city proper, a hundred tunnels lead off to mines, secret exit points, Salt Sea harbours, sewage outlets, slave pits and the like, all with a more traditional subterranean feel, having low ceilings and a rough hewn look.

Available occupations. DARK ELVEN: DarkLord, raider. HUMAN: Administrator, alchemist, assassin, cartographer, clothier, entertainer, farmer, fisherman, gladiator, hunter, illusionist, innkeeper, jeweller, locksmith, mercenary, mason, merchant, metalsmith, miller, miner, physician, potter, priest/acolyte, psionic, sailor/pirate, summoner, thief, weaponcrafter, wizard, woodcrafter.

2.14 Dwarfs of the Gaunt Peaks

History. By the dawning of the Dream Years, the Dwarfs of Korin-Thar had already divided into seven tribes, fierce and independent but linked by bonds of blood and friendship after years of struggle against the dragon lords. By the middle of the first millennium ER, considerable differences had become apparent between them. One tribe, the Grenidar, had settled in Darkwood and entered a period of rapid physical change, catalysed by their forest environment, to become the forefathers of the Gnomes. A second, the Felindar, settled the savannah, remaining proudly aloof from the lures of agriculture. The Brindar settled in the mountains to the north of the Salt Sea, irrigating and bringing life to this barren region from the safety of their vast underground home. The remaining four tribes, the Gurundar, Belgar, Krendar and Soljar settled a vast area to the west, from the foothills of the Gaunt Peaks across the Great River. The Battle Years, however, were not kind to the Dwarven tribes, now largely adjusted to the ways of agriculture. As human tribal affiliations disintegrated, vicious warlords emerged upon the steppes, their conquests forcing vanquished tribes in great migrations to the north and west. The Felindar were overrun and destroyed in these tribal migrations. The Soljar of the Great River suffered greatly, eventually turning to the Green Elves of the Silver Wood in desperation. Here they were received and granted protection, finally regaining a small kingdom on the shores of their beloved river as nature transformed them to become Hobbits. To the far south, the Brindar, free from human tribal pressures, were basely betrayed and massacred by their Dark-Elven guests. Of the three Tribes that remained truly Dwarven, one, the Krendar, took ship into the west, lost forever to history with no word returning as to their ultimate fate. The Gurundar and Belgar were also pushed west, and dug themselves into the Gaunt Peaks to fight a protracted and terrible war against the Orcs, Ogres, Trolls, and remaining lesser Dragons that claimed that region for their own. It was the Gurundar who emerged the eventual victors of a contest that spanned 500 years, the Belgar having fallen beneath the Orcish onslaught. By the 1500th year of the Elven calendar, they stood proud as the only remaining tribe of true Dwarfs known to inhabit Korin-Thar. Finally able to contain the aggression of the remaining tribes of Orcs from a position of relative safety, their political unity, forged in adversity, disintegrated. With the extinction of the original royal line, a civil war divided the Gurundar inheritance between four warring kingdoms, each claiming to be truly deserving of the old Gurundar claim to hegemony. Locked within their mountainous fortresses, they have remained insular ever since, jealously guarding their holdings against the advances of Orcs and the claims of their Dwarven competitors. Their access to and exploitation of the mountains' great mineral wealth, in combination with indisputable military prowess and strength of spirit have maintained them as lords of their mountainous domains, but the Dwarfs of Korin-Thar represent an odd paradox. They number among the wealthiest kingdoms in terms of accumulated precious metals and stones, yet remain anarchic and introverted with relatively low populations and little wider political influence.

Politics. The four Dwarven kingdoms are feudal states. Because of their relatively small sizes, they have developed according to a fairly pure feudal model. The king rules his own lands directly, and grants other lands to his great magnates (dukes) according to a feudal contract in which they promise him military service, specifically a given number of knights, fully armed and supported, for three months each year. They in turn contract with the lower nobility (known as thanes) who receive a small amount of land in exchange for the promise of their own military service and that of their extended families. Finally, the thanes provide land to the lower classes, who are contracted to provide rent or, more often, labour for their lords. All Dwarves are freemen, but to leave one's thane's lands is to forfeit one's land rights. In fact, the number of thanes each kingdom supports is rather less than the demands made by their kings (in terms of the number of men each noble is contracted to provide) so the practice of supplying money in kind has grown up alongside traditional military service. This taxation is used to support a standing army. Hence the Dwarven military is composed of a regular element (usually extremely war-hardened and competent) supported on major campaigns by an aristocracy devoted to war (the thanes). Dwarven offensive tactics are underdeveloped and somewhat clumsy, but defending a good position they are virtually unbeatable. Within each kingdom, the great magnates tend to wrestle for influence and small civil wars are relatively common. Loyalty, a prized Dwarven virtue, is more often to a thanehead (family head among a noble family), or, for the thaneheads themselves, to their immediate overlord (duke), rather than the king himself. The Dwarves seem naturally suited to smaller scale political loyalties, preferring a hands-on level of organisation.

Religion. The Dwarfs are monotheistic, but tend to be fairly non-religious in conduct, believing that the affairs of their God, Throndor, are presently far afield. Their priests are very few, usually abiding at the courts of the dukes and some of the thanes, and spend their time reminding the Dwarfs of the true nature of the universe, primarily through the medium of epic poetry. They wear grey robes lined about their hems with silver bands, and wear armbands displaying the symbol of their holy father, two red hammers with handles aligned. The Dwarfs believe that Throndor "the maker" forged the world in ages long past as a house for his favoured race. The Dwarfs accept other races as creations of Throndor, like all creatures being merely expressions of the creator's endless imagination. Throndor has made and continues to make countless worlds for his sport, to see how his chosen people will fare in each scenario. Occasionally, he may travel his creations to observe, but he is not vain and requires no active worship; recognition will suffice. Eventually, Throndor and his myriad worlds will die and leave only the void, just a when a Dwarf or any other creature passes away it decomposes, leaving nothing. Dwarfs believe in no after-life; death is final, but it is not feared. One's worldly conduct is relevant not because of spiritual consequences, but rather because one's clan (those thanes serving the same duke) will be judged by it. As the material world is the only real world, worldly affairs matter a great deal. Priests of Throndor are white in game terms.

Other powers. There are no other powers in Dwarven society.

Peoples. Dwarfs are physically described in the Hexicon rulebook section 1.2.3. Generally they grow thick beards, but sport a variety of hair styles. They prefer functional clothing, particularly leathers. Most Dwarfs favour heavy striking weapons such as axes and hammers. There are relatively few non-Dwarfs living within the four Dwarven kingdoms.

Trade, climate and demographics. While presenting a generally indifferent face towards the outside world, the Dwarfs are not hostile and are involved in regular trade. They offer precious and semi-precious stones and metals, and in particular have access to the only veins of mythril upon Korin-Thar. In terms of manufactured goods, the weapons and armour they produce are world renowned. There is also something of a specialist demand for Dwarf spirits, an obnoxious quadruple distilled clear liquor that approaches the strength of pure alcohol and is reckoned to induce a drunkenness unlike any other.

The land they inhabit is unwelcoming to most. The Gaunt Peaks are vast, spanning nearly 4000 miles north to south, with prevailing climate shifting from bitterly cold in the north to warm temperate in the south. The terrain is often rocky and unsuited to agriculture, although the lower slopes support forests and grasslands with a range of rare flora and fauna. These mountains are easily the highest upon Korin-Thar, stretching up to nine miles above sea level at their most extreme. Obviously, climate and conditions are far harder to endure at these altitudes, with year-round snow even in the south and a relative paucity of plant and animal life. The Dwarfs themselves live mostly underground, in vast networks of tunnels and halls lit by reflected sunlight and foul smelling black oil lamps (another raw material found here in abundance). They farm mostly fungi, hunting and gathering from the surface to supplement their diets. Around half a million Dwarfs make their homes in the Gaunt Peaks, spread widely across the four kingdoms and using their own unique script for written communications.

Cities. Each of the four Dwarven Kingdoms is centred around a single city. They are described here in longitudinal order, moving through the Gaunt Peaks from north to south.

Isgrend is the most northerly of the Dwarven states, and in some respects the most unusual, being built mostly above ground and at a relatively low altitude of around 7000 feet (a little over two kilometres). Both features are reflections of the city's extreme northern position. Buffered from human tribal aggression in the Battle Years the early inhabitants had little motivation to dig in to elaborate underground defences. Even had they wished to do so, it is doubtful whether even Dwarven light-reflecting technology and fungal farming methods would permit underground agriculture with summer temperatures rarely rising above 10° C. Similarly, low altitude living was simply driven by necessity; little survives higher up among the constant winter of the peaks. The kingdom nestles within a triangular valley, and is well protected despite its

surface location. The valley is virtually inaccessible on two sides, protected by precipitous cliffs, and has its third approach guarded by an imposing curtain wall lined with tall towers. The city itself is wedged at the far end of the valley, and is further protected by a second wall and numerous ditches and earth defences, often filled with soft snow to trap the unwary. The cultivated farmlands that support its population stretch down the valley towards the mighty palisade that locks out the outside world. Isgrend has grown rich upon the mining of precious stones, especially the rare blue diamonds that are found nowhere else. Its inhabitants are paranoid and unfriendly towards outsiders even by Dwarven standards; all trade is conducted through local Dwarven merchants, and the location of the city is a carefully guarded secret, with its rare visitors escorted blindfolded for the final day of their journey.

The next Dwarven city state is *Vilnwor*, built more traditionally underground. Indeed, the great halls that dominate the city centre, rising up hundreds of feet, were once the lair of the dragon lord Gregarnus. Now they house the royal palace, a series of markets and numerous guildhalls and drinking houses, their walls and ceilings sumptuously decorated with elaborate miniature stone carvings, the hallmark artistic medium of these revelry-loving people. Over the centuries the central halls have been supplemented by a massive network of tunnels and caverns, leading to numerous dwellings, mines, foodhalls and cunningly hidden exits. Each of these exits is defended by a killing terrace (a tunnel punctured with holes through which crossbows can be unleashed from the halls behind) and blocked off by a large circular stone door that can be easily rolled into place but offers extremely solid resistance to siege. The main approach to the city, which accesses it at an altitude of around 15000 feet, is marked every few miles by a squat watchtower. These early warning stations communicate using smoke signals, and their garrisons will often stop and question travellers on their way up towards the city gates. *Vilnwor* is especially rich in gold, mined here in abundance.

Tereak Vnar is arguably the richest of the Dwarven Kingdoms and certainly the highest, accessed from the very peaks of the mountains around it with the three main entrances all found at altitudes exceeding 20000 feet. It is built within the volcanic mount *Vnar*, a fact that is most strikingly evident when faced with the fortress of kings, the imposing citadel of the ruler of this strange state and ancient seat of the *Gurundar* royal line. The fortress is built upon a pinnacle that rises 2000 feet straight up out of the volcano's now extinct core, reaching up toward the heavens visible above through the mountain's vast rim another thousand feet above. The citadel is reached by one of three slender stone bridges, marvellous to behold, each leading to a separate town quarter and eventually to an external gate. Trade is conducted on this level, which also houses the city's more wealthy inhabitants. A vast network of lower levels can be accessed below, extending a great distance down towards the mines and workshops at the mountain's root. Here, the secret of the city's wealth, *mythryl*, as well as all manner of other metals, are worked with great artistry; the smiths capitalise upon the few known lava flows that remain to provide heat to their furnaces.

By far the quickest way to access the lower levels is by a series of winches that adorn the interior of the volcano's ancient and near-shear crater, although this can be a somewhat terrifying experience for the uninitiated.

The final Dwarven kingdom is *Bethendroc*, the most southerly and the most open to outsiders. This is an odd irony, given that the city is protected by the single greatest fortification ever built, a set of stone gates so vast that they require teams of hundreds assisted by pack animals simply to open and close them. The city has only one access point, its great gates, which usually stand open but were built to withstand a dragon assault when sealed. Other than this, only an intricate network of tiny ventilation shafts permit access to the local insect life. However, the kingdom has a relatively large population living in fortified villages in the surrounding region, which extends down to the coast of the Western Ocean and hence supports the only modern Dwarfs making active use of boats and ships. Despite its imposing exterior, the inner city of *Bethendroc* has a rough hewn and jovial feel, with its many connecting passages punctuated by small halls housing markets and alehouses. While the city has good access to semi-precious stones and a variety of metals, its unique mineral crop comes in the form of *nadwin*, a grey coal-like substance that forms the essential base for a secret compound with explosive properties. *Nadwin* is so rare and dangerous to mine that few outside the city even know of its existence. It provides the thirty strong elite royal guard of *Bethendroc* with *Korin-Thar*'s only firearms, unique *mythryl*-barrelled muskets, only three of which have ever been obtained by outsiders. Given that the *nadwin* for a single shot with these weapons costs about as much as a large diamond, they are fired extremely rarely, usually as a spectacle at the annual festival of good harvest.

Available occupations. DWARVEN: Heavy footman, light footman, thane/knight. HUMAN: Administrator, alchemist, assassin, bounty hunter, cartographer, clothier, entertainer, farmer, fisherman, hunter, innkeeper, jeweller, locksmith, mercenary, mason, merchant, metalsmith, miller, miner, physician, potter, priest/acolyte, sailor/pirate, scout, thief, toymaker, weapon crafter, wood crafter.

2.15 Hobbits of the Great River

History. As previously recounted, the Battle Years were not kind to the early Dwarven tribes of Korin-Thar. One such tribe, the Seljar, had settled to a life of agriculture upon the banks of the Great River, but were all but destroyed in the early eleventh century ER as waves of nomadic human tribesmen overran the area. What few of them remained made a desperate flight into the Silver Wood, where they were fortuitously received and permitted to settle by the Wood Elves dwelling within. Only the Seljar's desperation and impressive diplomatic skills can explain this unique policy of friendship on the part of the Elves, usually so secretive and mistrustful. Two centuries of mutually rewarding coexistence cemented ties between the two peoples and saw the progeny of the Seljar undergo a powerful physical transformation to become the forefathers of the modern Hobbits. In 1235 ER the Kolsh, one of the human tribes then dominating the Great River area and turning towards agrarian living, initiated a policy of slash and burn expansion into the Silver Wood. They took advantage of a long dry period to burn out a swathe of woodland from the river to the east, clearing a triangular area around 400 miles across before the fires eventually died. The Wood Elven response was predictable and deadly; outraged by the destruction of their beloved homeland, they conducted a devastating campaign that left the Kolsh tribal confederacy utterly shattered. The land that had been cleared was bequeathed to the Hobbits, who longed for such a haven to farm between river and wood. From that time forth the tiny Hobbit state has flourished in relative obscurity, protected from external aggression by their Wood-Elven patrons and developing trade links with the outside world that reflect the joviality of the Hobbit people. Their state is older than most, but has changed little since its establishment, maintaining a relaxed timelessness that is both idyllic and stultifying.

Politics. Politics within the Hobbit state are loosely democratic. A balance is maintained between the prince, respected as the font of justice, and the elected legislature, whose various members (referred to as the prince's ministers) make the most vital decisions of state and control taxation. The prince is considered the highest judge in the land. He appoints other judges directly as he sees fit, and it is they who convene courts of law within their appointed jurisdictions and are responsible for the maintenance of law and order and the collection of taxes. To achieve this, they tend to rely on local squires, wealthy landowners with the time to organise local militias. The legislature is in theory independent of the prince, making policy decisions, maintaining foreign ambassadors and controlling the exchequer. In reality, the two branches are highly interdependent, as the legislature (composed of 64 ministers) funds the prince and his agents, relies on them to collect the taxes it sets, and is elected by the very same squires that the judicial system ultimately relies on. This fact reflects the stringent property requirement for voting. A single minister is elected in each of 64 electoral regions to serve for a period of nine years. A male Hobbit must own or rent land above a certain value within a given region to gain a vote. As most voters are independent farmers who rent

their land from the wealthy squires, and votes must be declared publicly, they tend to vote as directed by their landlords. Hence the status quo is maintained to the satisfaction of everyone (or at least everyone of importance). The Hobbit state maintains a militia, with units organised at a local level and funded centrally. They operate more as a police force than an army however, although capable of fulfilling that role in times of need.

Religion. Hobbit religion probably emerged initially from an uncomfortable attempt to combine Dwarven religious sentiment (or rather lack of it) with the influence of the Wood-Elven druids and human tribal beliefs. The official religion here worships Adidan, the river God. His priests wear a distinctive ankle bracelet, with an iron chain attached to either end of a stylised silver fish, and preach weekly to polite gatherings in riverside glades, living at a respectful distance from the main community. They are honoured if not really revered, and are often provided with charitable offerings, making the role of priest a relatively fruitful one. Wealthy members of the community often invite them to supper too, as their company bestows its recipients with a certain moral kudos that benefits their social position; priests are often rotund even by Hobbit standards. The faith they preach is unusual, in that the Gods it recognises have little interest in humanoid affairs. Rather, they represent natural forces such as tides and winds, and compete with one another for mastery of the world, indifferent to the creatures that inhabit it. Adidan is the greatest of the river Gods, and therefore their king. He is known as the taker of souls, for it is the belief of the Hobbits that the Great River carries the souls of the dead down to the ocean, where the water boils up to become the clouds. Rains then return the souls to the lands of the living, but they have become interwoven, such that when they touch a new child he receives a fresh and unique soul created from the many that came before. The story brings with it an important moral message, that every Hobbit soul has a little in common with all others, an adage used to encourage the virtues of charity and empathy. Crucial ceremonies include the final offering up of the dead to the body of Adidan (the Great River) on highly decorated (and status dependent) funeral boats, and the "rebirth" of a child, when they are held high to the first rainfall following birth. Priests of Adidan are blue in game terms. While other religions can be found here and are generally well tolerated, with small pockets of followers, the landed classes conform to the worship of Adidan, a statement of solidarity and respectability. Minor sects and cults are the preserve of the poor and dispossessed, or occasional itinerant sons of the aristocracy, a reflection of the discontent that bubbles beneath the surface even in this society of conspicuous and practised politeness.

Other powers. There are no other powers of any real significance in Hobbit society.

Peoples. Hobbits are physically described in the Hexicon rulebook, section 1.2.4. Hair is usually cropped short for men and worn long and braided for women. The lower classes tend to dress functionally, in tight hose, shirts and tunics. Hats are worn widely in a variety of styles, but most Hobbits go bare-footed. The landed classes prefer

smarter, better tailored clothing, but ostentatious dress (or household decoration) is perceived to be tacky and the height of bad taste. The secret is therefore to be understated whilst still leaving no doubt as to one's impressive income.

Trade, climate and demographics. Situated at a pleasant northerly latitude, the Hobbit homeland enjoys temperate but changeable weather, with average temperatures of around 5° C in winter and 25° C in summer. Hobbits live in burrows, built shallowly beneath the ground and emerging in circular front doors, with the grander premises having occasional "tall rooms" with ceilings that project up to conical thatched roofs above ground. Poorer hobbits can only afford "out houses," wooden cabins built above ground and objected to for their lack of insulation. The state is small and fertile, well irrigated and easy to farm, with the river providing a thriving fishing industry. Trade with the wider world is active, in part because the Hobbits offer themselves as willing intermediaries between the Wood Elves and outsiders. In addition to acting as middlemen in this trade, Hobbit landowners provide a market for luxury goods from across Korin-Thar. The region is particularly well suited to orchards and fruit farming, providing the major Hobbit exports, dried fruit and vintage cider of unsurpassed quality. Around a quarter of a million Hobbits live here, joined by a small number of human settlers who are generally well integrated and liked, but not allowed to bear or own arms except in times of war. This prohibition extends to all travellers within the territory; weapons must be bound up in leather packages and sealed with wax at recognised border points, with a broken seal carrying severe penalties. The most commonly used script in the Hobbit state is now Elven, but Dwarven and Bovdoran are also widely employed and understood.

Cities. The vast majority of Hobbits live in small rural villages, and only one settlement here can really be described as a city, the capital, Bdeiros. Situated to the north of the region on the banks of the Great River it is a bustling town with an active harbour and a thriving market. The main market square is surrounded on three sides by guild houses, with the legislature's grand meeting chamber occupying the final side with its intricate marble façade. Behind the meeting chamber stretches the royal palace, a network of finely decorated tunnels constructed beneath its beautifully maintained landscaped garden grounds. The palace grounds are flanked on both sides by less splendid but nonetheless picturesque parks, the favoured place to be seen for the town's gentry. While the buildings here are grand by Hobbit standards, the city seems strangely flat to outsiders, with few buildings extending to a third floor aside from the guild buildings at its centre. In fact, the city's wall is the tallest feature, surrounded by a moat flooded from the Great River and bridged in three places to allow access. Virtually all external trade passes through Bdeiros, making it an oddly lively, charged and eclectic atmosphere that contrasts with the sleepiness of rural Hobbit life.

Available occupations. HOBBIT: Landowner, militiaman, servant. HUMAN: Administrator, apothecary, cartographer, clothier, entertainer, farmer, fisherman,

hunter, innkeeper, jeweller, locksmith, mason, merchant, metalsmith, miller, miner, physician, potter, priest/acolyte, sailor/pirate, scout, thief, toymaker, weapon crafter, woodcrafter.

2.16 Wolven of the Wolven Isles

History. The history of the Wolven is obscure to most of the world, but actually fairly well preserved in the epic poetry favoured by these fierce and proud peoples. Warlike, tribal and adventurous, they once inhabited mainland regions to the north and east of the Silver Wood, extending as far east as the present day Kingdom of the Iron Ring. From here they launched their longships far and wide, and in the early Dream Years discovered the Wolven Isles (Rachanqchan or “six pearls” in the Wolven tongue). During the Battle Years the various Wolven tribes became more distinct and competitive, their earlier unity lost. Reflecting mainland events, where the various Wolven kingdoms (misnamed colonies by Elven historians) had become independent, each isle became for a time independent too, although the two most westerly, Rechnaq and Qiran were soon reunited under the Silvertooth tribe. For the mainland kingdoms division proved costly. The great human tribal migrations of the Battle Years pushed the eastern colonies into the sea, whilst those situated to the west near the Silver Wood were conquered piecemeal by the armies of the Crystal Isle, swelled with human mercenaries hungering for Elven gold. In the far north, Rachanqchan became the sole bastion of Wolven civilisation and has from that time forth provided an unassailable fortress from which to pillage the rich kingdoms to the south and west. The six isles are now divided between five tribal groupings, living in a semi-agrarian twilight between tribalism and civilisation. The Silvertooth tribe claims the two western isles. The largest, central isle of Grengaq belongs to the Fangs. To the north lies the tiny isle of Kilka and its arctic colonies, ruled by the Moonfur tribe. Easterly Bakheavey hosts the Nightprowls, while the small but heavily populated isle of Pleqnip to the south is Wisefur territory.

Politics. While Wolven society allows a degree of specialisation, virtually all Wolven are warriors too (known as vikings), and spend time exploring, trading or more usually raiding and looting every year during the campaigning season. Those who specialise entirely and never engage in warlike activities either occupy a profession involving year round commitment, regular travel or a much respected skill (e.g. innkeepers, merchants, cartographers and apothecaries, priests and shamans) or are simply too poor to maintain their own weapons and equipment. Such poor Wolven are generally treated as second class citizens, but can expect some degree of support from their fellow Wolven in times of especial hardship. Most Wolven live in villages of around thirty families, known as clans and ruled by a single clanhead. Settlements are built on the coast or along rivers, and each maintains a single longship for raiding purposes. The clanhead is a military leader who acts as the local judge in disputes, with the fines imposed as punishments providing the major part of his income. He is also entitled to a greater than normal share of war booty. Each clan is loyal to their greater tribe; irregular meetings of a council of all loyal clanheads are the only expression of this unity, with a single leader elected in times of war, but the sense of solidarity is a powerful force. The clans will unite eagerly at certain times, forsaking their regular raiding activities for a chance to campaign en masse.

Tribal gatherings tend to be presaged by particular natural events (solar eclipses, tsunami, tornadoes etc.) and often leave the unfortunate recipients of any tribal decision reached (usually to undertake a major raid) confused and battered. To the Wolven mentality, a sign from the spirits that action is required will supersede any diplomatic agreement that may be in place (diplomatic agreements with the Wolven usually consisting of a large yearly protection-style payment offered to offset serious attack).

Religion. Wolven religious practice is split between shamanic spirit worship on the one hand and worship of Baeqaj the moon God on the other. Most Wolven do not really distinguish between the two, treating shamans and priests with equal respect, although the differences are more apparent to the clergy themselves. Both priests and shamans are visited for advice and often relied upon by clanheads to read omens and offer council. A given village is likely to have access to one or other rather than both, however. Details of shamanic beliefs can be found in the religion section for tribesmen of the southern steppes. Essentially, all creatures, objects and natural forces are believed to have spirits, and the shaman is able to commune with and make use of such spirits for his own ends. Shamanism is the older religion here, with Baeqaj’s worship growing out of traditional beliefs during the Tranquil Years. Baeqaj is the spirit of the moon. While Wolven Shamans recognise him as a powerful force, the priesthood that is devoted to him has elevated him to a position of lord spirit or deity; they see the rest of the spirit world as ultimately in his service. Baeqaj’s symbol is an ivory disk hung upon a silver chain. He represents sudden change and metamorphosis, instinct, inspiration, genius and madness, and uncertainty. His followers believe that like him the world is in flux, hiding behind a façade of ordered progression. Planning and attempts to predict the future are futile, for there is no true pattern, only a chaos of possibilities for mortals and spirits alike. Above all they value Jatoqi, a Wolven word that roughly translates to “flexible action” or “no mind”, a state obtained when one can operate at a purely instinctual level, responding to and embracing the fluxing events in the physical world. This state is prized as both a combative ideal (the essence of the true warrior) and a true philosophy, a way to lead one’s life that is in tune with the underlying reality of the physical world. Priests of Baeqaj are red in game terms; GMs may alternatively allow them to take the occupation of druid, as ever at their discretion.

Other powers. There are no other powers in Wolven society.

Peoples. Wolvens are physically described in the Hexicon rulebook, section 1.2.10. For dress, additional furs are usually preferred in winter, tunics of leather reaching to mid thigh in the summer. Much of the legs, including the feet, are often left uncovered, with chainmail hauberts often donned for war. Personal decoration including intricate jewellery is extremely common. The five tribes each have distinctive features. The Silvertooths tend to be brown furred, and wear a fine silver ring through a hole carved in their upper left canine as a symbol of their tribal affiliation. The Fangs come in various shades, again

most commonly brown, but are striking for their extended upper canines. The Moonfurs are usually white, light grey or silvery, while the Nightprowls are almost always black in hue. Finally, the Wisefurs come in a variety of fur colours, but tend to be dappled with patches of grey. Virtually no non-Wolven live amongst them, with the spidery Wolven script used for extremely rare written communication.

Trade, climate and demographics. The Wolven Isles are brutally cold, rarely rising much above zero even in the summer months and often falling to -30° C in the winter. The isles are rocky and precipitous about their coastlines, rising rapidly to hills and peaks, and are dominated by pine forests and networks of rivers and streams, saved from freezing only by their own rapidity. The one exception is Kilka, which has little indigenous vegetation but numerous hot volcanic springs beneath its icy exterior. Hunting and fishing are far more productive than agriculture here. The Wolven trade internally, primarily for metal ores and decorative items, and occasional entrepreneurs engage in international trade, mainly exporting furs, although generally pillage is preferred over exchange. Trade is usually in kind, as there is no established coinage here. The isles support a population of around half a million Wolven, generally living in log cabins with the occasional stone fortress. Only in the far north (Kilka and its arctic colonies) are igloos preferred.

Cities. There are no cities here, only fortified villages.

Available occupations. WOLVEN: Clanhead. HUMAN: Apothecary, cartographer, fisherman, hunter, innkeeper, merchant, priest, viking, shaman (northern).

2.17 Gnomes

Habitat and History. Gnomes were originally descended from the forefathers of the Dwarfs and Hobbits, but their ancestors took to the forests and found themselves much changed by the experience. Nowadays they live almost exclusively in forests, particularly temperate ones. The largest populations can be found within the undisturbed vastness of Darkwood, but they also dwell in the Silver Wood, coexisting with the Wood Elves with little interaction, and in the many smaller areas of woodland that dominate the northern regions of Korin-Thar. The Overall Gnomish population remains relatively small however, with perhaps a hundred thousand scattered across the world.

Politics. Gnomes live in small nuclear family units under the leadership of the male parent. Generally, when male children reach an appropriate age they spend a period travelling alone in search of other Gnomes and, in particular, a bride. Daughters tend to remain with their parents until courted by a suitor; many end up tending to their parents in their old age. Gnome families are solitary experts in forest law, and will rarely be found against their wishes. They live as hunter-gatherers, typically making regular migrations within a well-explored area. While they can be quite territorial over the regions they inhabit, they will tend to move on in preference to serious confrontation.

Religion. Gnomes lack an organised religion, but tend to recognise some personification of nature as a God. There is no scripture or active worship here, simply a personal identification with forces that control events beyond mortal control. The dead are honoured with burial, with a rather vague belief in some kind of reincarnation being prevalent.

Peoples. Gnomes are physically described in the Hexicon rulebook, section 1.2.5. They tend to wear simple leather clothing suitable to forest life, bearing staffs, spears and bows as weapons.

Available occupations. GNOME: Ranger-hunter. NB. Gnomes are often sought out by human hunters as curiosities and sold in cities. Gnomish children are if anything more susceptible to capture than their elders. It is recommended that they be allowed to pursue human occupations such as thief, wizard etc.

2.18 Orcs

Available occupations. ORC: Chieftain, warrior-hunter.

Habitat and History. Orcs are a wild and adaptable race that originally colonised much of Korin-Thar. However, their inability to organise at a level above that of individual tribes has led to their being marginalised by the burgeoning states of civilised races. They now occupy regions that are either undesirable to agrarian cultures, naturally defensible, or challenging to the creation of fortified towns with adequate communications to organise concerted defence in the face of Orcish aggression. In particular, Orcs can be found in hilly and mountainous regions and desert areas as well as isolated woodlands, and coexist with human tribesmen on the plains. The largest populations are found in the Gaunt Peaks, Northern Wastes, to the north and east of the Kingdom of the Iron Ring, in the mountainous lands and plains around the Salt Sea, and in the Southern Desert. The total Orcish population of Korin-Thar is vast by tribal standards, being in the region of 10-15 million.

Politics. Orcish society is tribal and particularly cruel. Tribes live together in semi-permanent villages, although constructions are rudimentary and natural shelters such as caves are generally preferred. They practice no agriculture, relying on hunting and the plundering of other tribes for sustenance. Tribes generally consist of around forty extended family groups, with a single chieftain ruling, a job that essentially involves war leadership. Such leadership is maintained purely by might; a challenger who can defeat the chieftain can take his place. For this reason chieftains are almost always the physically powerful Black Orcs. There is very little in the way of law here, simply the fear of reprisal in communities where everyone knows each other. The old and sick are neither respected nor assisted and tend not to last too long. The same can be said of Orcs who fail to gain alliances within the tribe; Orcs are cruel and bullying and will take delight in exploiting perceived weakness and isolation. All male Orcs are expected to fight at the chieftain's behest, and do so regularly. As a species they are bloodthirsty and aggressive, but disorganised and prone to routing.

Religion. Orcs are not really religious, but they are extremely superstitious. Their beliefs are closest to those of shamanism (see the section on tribesmen of the southern steppes) but there are no actual Shamans to give direction to these inclinations. Hence spirits are blamed for ill fortune and natural events, and regarded with a sense of great fear. Often, attempts to appease the spirits will result in lynching and live sacrifice, particularly of the diseased, who are believed to be harbouring evil spirits within them.

Peoples. Orcs are physically described in the Hexicon rulebook section 1.2.6. They dress in furs and leathers and have little skill with textiles. Armour is rarely worn, except when captured from more civilised combatants and borne as a status symbol. Similarly, weapons are typically spears, wooden shields and short bows, except where they have been captured.

2.19 Ogres and Draconians

Habitats and History. While having little in common physically, Ogres and Draconians share very similar societies. Like the Orcs, both exist in rugged, wilderness areas (particularly mountainous and desert regions) far away from the centres of civilisation. They can of course be found within civilised realms, living in wilder and less densely settled areas and often known to local villagers. However, like the Orcs, they are more common in regions such as the Gaunt Peaks, Northern Wastes and Southern Desert, as well as to the north and east of the Kingdom of the Iron Ring and in the mountainous lands and plains around the Salt Sea. Ogres are more common, numbering perhaps a quarter of a million across Korin-Thar, while there are around 100 000 Draconians.

Politics. Ogres and Draconians live in extended family groups of ten to thirty, each controlled by a dominant male (chieftain) who exercises rights of leadership, maintaining his position through violence. Groups control a territory that they hunt and forage from. They will defend that territory fiercely. Law and learning are minimal, with fear of the dominant male keeping the other males in line. These family societies are actually rather more supportive than Orcish tribes. The elderly will often receive some degree of care and respect, and even the challenges for position within the group hierarchy often end in submission before a death occurs. There is a simple practicality behind this system; the groups are about as small as is viable for successful hunting and the raising of children, so a high death rate in intra-family conflicts would jeopardise everyone. Solidarity is absolute in the face of external threat.

Religion. Like the Orcs, Ogres and Draconians are superstitious rather than religious, believing in cruel spirits to give order to the chaos of natural events (see the shamanic religion of the southern steppes) but lacking any religious hierarchy. They are however more civilised than the Orcs in some respects; they will often bury their dead with prized possessions, preparing them for an afterlife presumed similar to their current one. Death is consequently a more dignified affair than in the large Orcish tribes, where bodies are often piled and left as carrion within sight of the village proper.

Peoples. Ogres are physically described in the Hexicon rulebook section 1.2.7, Draconians in section 1.2.9. Both races dress lightly, usually in little more than loin-cloths, donning simple furs and leathers in colder climes. Forged metal weapons and armour are extremely rare, with spears and clubs being much more in evidence.

Available occupations. OGRE /DRACONIAN: Chieftain, warrior-hunter.

2.20 Trolls

Habitats and history. Trolls are solitary menaces; capable of destroying whole villages when provoked or hungry, their presence in civilised regions is generally met with a concerted military effort. For this reason, they have been driven, like their cousins the Orcs and Ogres, to inhabit rugged and deserted wastelands, occasionally marauding into the outskirts of civilisation. Trolls can now be found mostly in the Gaunt Peaks, Northern Wastes and Southern Desert, as well as to the north and east of the Kingdom of the Iron Ring and in the mountainous lands and plains around the Salt Sea. There are around 50 000 of them inhabiting Korin-Thar.

Politics. Troll communities consist of a dominant female leading a group of other females (usually related) and occupying a large territory in which they hunt to feed their young. The males, by contrast, are entirely solitary, only making contact with other Trolls to fight for mating rights and actually procreate. They will often visit a community for a few nights, taking partners at will, then return for months to their isolated wanderings, ranging far and wide to locate new groups of females. Consequently, when a Troll enters a civilised region, it is usually a male. Natural dwellings like caves or ruins are often sought out by the female-dominated communities, occasionally supplemented by rudimentary shelters of wood and leather.

Religion. Trolls have nothing in the way of organised religion, and only a very basic sense of superstition. They recognise no afterlife, but generally leave their dead in traditional graveyard areas, far from where they live and eat.

Peoples. Trolls are physically described in the Hexicon rulebook section 1.2.8. They rarely wear any garments beyond loincloths, never don armour, and make use of tree trunks and the like as makeshift clubs for beating their unfortunate prey.

Available occupations. TROLL: Hunter.

2.21 Giants

Habitats and history. Giants are less inherently destructive than most of the tribal races their lifestyles resemble, but their capacity for havoc when conflict arises has made them the natural enemies of civilised states. For this reason, they have also been pushed to the edges of the cultivatable world. Like the other monstrous races, Giants can now be found mostly in the Gaunt Peaks, Northern Wastes and Southern Desert, as well as to the north and east of the Kingdom of the Iron Ring and in the mountainous lands and plains around the Salt Sea. Around 20 000 of them live across Korin-Thar.

Politics. Giant communities revolve around a dominant male who establishes himself among a harem-style group of females, dominating a large territory in which the group hunt and forage. Young males are tolerated in the group until they reach maturity, at which point they are forced to leave and seek another group. Dominant males consequently defend their position against the occasional incursion by challengers who wish to acquire their own harem; the resultant conflicts are terrible in their intensity and generally fatal for one party or other. They are neither ceremonial nor honourable affairs; any advantage, gained by subterfuge (e.g. liaisons with disaffected females) or ambush will be pressed to the full, giving these conflicts an assassination-like quality. Single males seeking a harem often live in natural dwellings like caves, while the harem communities benefit from continuous occupation and often centre around an impressively sized feasting hall, usually built in wood but sometimes of stone. Tools are rudimentary by truly civilised standards, but nonetheless advanced enough for the production of a range of foodstuffs and weaponry, although metalworking knowledge is rare.

Religion. Giants are irreligious in conduct and outlook, although it is not unknown for them to be worshipped as Gods themselves by local tribes. They are somewhat superstitious, but without any formalised scripture or the like. Some vague concept of an afterlife is recognised however, as funerals are commonly held, with cremation usually practised.

Peoples. Giants are physically described in the Hexicon rulebook section 1.2.12. They often wear clothing of roughly stitched fur and leather, and occasionally don armour. Leather and wooden shields, stone-bladed axes, wooden hammers, clubs and long spears are often employed for combat.

Available occupations. GIANT: Fighter.

2.22 Changelings

Habitats and history. The changelings have the longest history of all the races of Korin-Thar, being the descendants of the Eldar who first mastered the raw magic and civilised the world. However, much of their past is lost to the realms of legend and conjecture, as they have for long years lived a secret existence without a kingdom of their own, unable to retain the arcane lore of their ancient forefathers. At some point during the Dream Years a section of the Eldar, apparently influenced by the other-dimensional power emanating from the dimension of life, decided to forsake the war against the younger races. They took upon themselves the power to change form, disguised themselves as their enemies and infiltrated them, living among them in secrecy. From that time forth they vanished from the pages of recorded history, living in isolation within their host societies, careful not to draw attention to themselves. This is not to say that their existence is unknown; folk legend everywhere tells of their misdeeds, and fuels a hatred of these enemies within that occasionally spills over into mob violence and sham trials (usually against innocents). In particular, the fanciful idea that changelings murder babies and replace them with their own children is a commonly held mistruth. This ongoing cycle of mistrust only heightens the changelings' unwillingness to reveal themselves or their true motives (the simple desire to live in peace, usually). Changelings can be found in all of Korin-Thar's civilised societies, but number no more than 50 000 in total.

Politics. Having no realm of their own, the changelings are constrained by the political system of the state they inhabit. They usually live in small nuclear family groups, until such time as the children are ready to move out and make homes for themselves. Their major difficulty is in finding partners with whom to settle; a changeling family will usually be aware of the location of a few other related changeling groups, but the need for secrecy means that there is no overall structure, only loose kinship networks. The discovery of a fellow changeling is therefore a great boon. Many changelings grow to old age as bachelors and spinsters, unable to find a spouse outside the prescribed degrees of relatedness, a fact that does as much as the race's poor fertility to keep the overall population so small. They tend to move often and make few firm friends, primarily to disguise their abnormally long life span from their neighbours.

Religion. There is no standard religion among the changelings. For security's sake they tend to follow the faith of the land in which they live, and indeed often become genuine converts, despite a racial proclivity towards scepticism.

Peoples. Changelings are physically described in the Hexicon rulebook section 1.2.11. They will adopt the dress and manners of their host nation.

Available occupations. Changelings can choose any occupation from the society in which they live. This effectively means that they have access to all occupations,

although they are often more suited to those involving the use of magic.

2.23 Pixis

Habitats and history. The history of the Pixis is obscure, made all the more so by their wilful refusal to take the slightest interest in their own origins or development. They are recorded in anecdotal tales from the literatures of more civilised nations from earliest times, and may even have coexisted with the Eldar. Certainly, they have always been most at home among the tall trees, inhabiting the many forests scattered across Korin-Thar, as well as the great expanses of Darkwood and the Silver Wood. Their habitat has shrunk with the slash and burn expansion of the sedentary states and herding pastoralists, but they remain relatively populous, with perhaps 100 000 Pixis available to trouble their mortal playthings.

Politics. Pixis live in large tribal groupings, under the loose leadership of a “chief trickster”, a magical leader who directs the clan in its mischief. There is little in the way of hierarchy amongst them, because there is little in the way of work. With their immortality granting freedom from mundane need, the Pixis live a life of unashamed hedonism, seeking out gratification in narcotic excess, sensual pleasures and the torment of other races through cruel practical jokes. They are widely and correctly feared and avoided despite their diminutive size. Pixi life revolves around the faerie circle, the centre of their territory and chief place of celebration. Here they sleep, over-eat and make merry, their happy chatter masking the strange silence left by the departed forest animals.

Religion. Pixis find the very concept of religion risible, most likely a bizarre psychological consequence of other races’ tendency to die before they have grown bored of life. As a race, they are extremely ill equipped for the contemplation of anything much, so philosophical and theological considerations never really occur to them.

Peoples. Pixis are physically described in the Hexicon rulebook section 1.2.13. They dress in brightly coloured clothing of an impractical nature or go naked, and rarely wear any form of armour. Bows and arrows are the preferred weaponry, with a widespread use of poisons.

Available occupations. PIXI: Archer, chief-trickster. HUMAN: Illusionist, psionic, wizard.

2.24 Centaurs

Habitats and history. The centaurs have maintained their current lifestyle virtually unchanged for millennia, living as hunter-gatherers upon the great stretch of savannah to the west of the Southern Steppes. Their population is small and tribal, rarely numbering above 50 000, and probably originated with some ancient magical experiment of the Eldar, although their own tradition proposes an alternative aetiology (see the religion section).

Politics. Centaurs are tribal but by no means uncivilised, with a strong traditional respect for education and learning and their own distinctive script (events of importance and epic poetry are recorded upon rocks and in caves along the Centaurs' migratory paths). They live in small tribes of three or four extended families and are true nomads, shifting location every few weeks or when serious confrontation with larger human and Orcish tribes seems imminent. Centaur society is extremely dependent on the longbow as a means of hunting and defence, such that the only specialised occupation here is that of the fletcher, a respected full time job. The small tribes make decisions according to debate; all the adults, male and female, express their opinions, with each family head (senior male) having a single vote to decide policy. Crimes are judged using an identical system, with banishment as the only acceptable punishment for transgressing tribal lore.

Religion. Centaurs have no formal priesthood or recorded scripture, but maintain a rich oral folklore with its own creation myth and afterlife beliefs. It is believed that in ancient times the world was a great plain, home to vast herds of horses and their tenders, the Centaur. Nyanyeh, the spirit horse and cloud lord, maintained this worldly paradise. But over time many of the Centaurs lost their faith in Nyanyeh and became selfish and greedy, so Nyanyeh punished them by taking away their hooves and abandoning his sky plain for other worlds. These poor punished souls became the bipeds, sentenced eternally to walk slowly and without grace, while those who remained faithful begot the modern Centaurs. When the time has come, Nyanyeh will return to reward the faithful, destroying their enemies upon Korin-Thar and re-establishing the lost nirvana. In the meantime, those who worship him are transported upon death to await him in the pasture of the clouds. Hence Centaurs cremate their dead with great ceremony, allowing their souls to ascend and join the clouds above.

Peoples. Centaurs are physically described in the Hexicon rulebook, section 1.2.14. They wear no clothes, and rarely don armour, fighting with longbows, but also staffs, spears and wooden shields.

Available occupations. CENTAUR: Hunter, fletcher.

2.25 Sverians

Habitats and history. Being limited in number and tribal in outlook, the Sverians have been excluded from the areas brought under plow by the large sedentary civilisations of Korin-Thar. Like the monstrous races, they can mostly be found in the Gaunt Peaks, Northern Wastes and Southern Desert, as well as to the north and east of the Kingdom of the Iron Ring and in the mountainous lands and plains around the Salt Sea. However, they are a deeply aesthetic people, and also quite capable of defending themselves against tribal assault, so have tended to make their homes in places of unusual natural richness and beauty, such as desert oases and around mountainous lakes and waterfalls. They currently number around 50 000 and live in a manner that has changed little over their long and largely obscure history. They claim descent from a separatist sect of the Eldar in the Dream Years, as good a theory as any recorded in the histories of the civilised nations.

Politics. Sverian tribes consist of around fifty extended family groups living as settled hunter-gatherers. They are ruled by a council of angels, the highest Sverian form. The other two advanced incarnations (magi and warriors) fulfil specialist functions as tribal defenders (commanders and foot soldiers respectively). The lowest form, the wayfarers, carry out the bulk of the menial work. Wayfarers are encouraged to leave the tribe following their apprenticeships, in order to speed their evolution towards a higher form, but a substantial number remain, rarely making it beyond the first life stage. Book learning is little respected here; only the active search for experience can lead to true enlightenment.

Religion. Although there is no religious occupation within Sverian society, the angels are respected as guardians of sacred knowledge regarding the afterlife and the true nature of the universe. It is widely held that death leads to reincarnation, but not necessarily upon Korin-Thar. Korin-Thar is the realm in which those who die as wayfarers are reborn; for those who die in more advanced forms, separate worlds exist for rebirth, each with its own metamorphic hierarchy. The number of such dimensions through which a soul must ultimately pass to achieve enlightenment cannot be known from this world, only from those that lie closer to its attainment, but each world provides lessons in the ultimate truth of the universe. Korin-Thar is the world of flesh, and its lessons lie in the many examples of cyclical systems that are evidenced in nature's rich tapestry; these demonstrate the truth of the reincarnative system that transcends each individual plane. Sverian religion posits no Gods, but does not deny them; their truth is simply unknowable from the perspective of life on Korin-Thar.

Peoples. Sverians are physically described in the Hexicon rulebook, section 1.2.15. They wear simple functional clothing, usually reflecting locally available materials, but are fond of decoration, including jewellery and skin and hair colouring. They rarely put on armour even for war, but fashion a variety of weapons and make wide use of iron and other metals.

Available occupations. SVERIAN: Wayfarer.