

Origin and fragmentation of the Kulthean races

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Exerpts from an early draft of “An Inquiry into the Nature of the various Forms of Sentinence and Civilization” by Karris deriv Nergalim, professor of History at the *Imperial Academy of Knowledge* in Haalkitaine

Althans

Aeons ago, the Kulthea was the centre of a vast Empire ruled by the K'ta'Viiri. Once they were a clan of the Althan race, but they developed a unique bond with the Essence and became immortal and powerful - The Lords of Essence. The Lords of Essence were mightier than any other flesh bound people, but their power did not give them peace. In the end they turned against each other, and destroyed themselves. Their empire crumbled and their home world Kulthea - our world - was laid waste.

But long before that, K'ta'viiri scientists studied and even changed life to give birth to new forms. The existence of their more hideous creations, among them kæden and gogor, have long been recorded, but their most widespread practice is less known, though (or perhaps because of) it is perhaps even more disturbing.

The K'ta'viiri used a combination of genetic and essence manipulation to change themselves. They increased their sensibility to the essence even further and expanded their life span to near infinity. More like gods than the men they once were, this ascendance of the Lords of Essence brought about a profound change in the society of the Althans. The ruling class, no longer bound by natural death, and possessing absolute power over their worlds, distanced themselves ever more from their subjects. And inevitably, resentment towards them rose.

Somewhere between 3000 and 7000 before the interregnum the K'ta'viiri began punishing criminals and dissenters by removing one finger from each hand and scrambling the distinctly uniform althan eye colour. They also shortened their life span from that of ordinary althans. Since these changes were coded into their genes, the result was that the althan society split again, and these dissenters gave rise to a steadily growing slave race.

Why such complicated measures? The K'ta'viiri were never gentle masters, but the unbridled terror Kadæna time was still far away. By the introduction of a third althan race, ordinary Althan citizens were given a sense of superiority that dampened the envy toward the K'ta'viiri. Combined with the chance, however marginal, of being raised to K'ta'Viiri, a social balance that lasted thousands of years was achieved.

However, this balance came at the cost of constant and brutal repression of the subalthans. In fact, Althans and K'ta'viiri here had a common interest which must not be overlooked when analysing the relative calm between them. This may have been incidental, but it is just as likely that this was the K'ta'viiran plan all along. If so, it is easy to see the seed for the degeneration leading to their fall.

In any case, by the time of the final conflict between Kadæna and Utha, most Althans had long left Kulthea, but the millions of subalthans there had no way out. The remaining Althans were killed by Kadæna, and though subalthans were too insignificant to be actively exterminated, the devastation ripping across the planet left few enough alive.

Humans

The K'ta'viirans were gone, but they left behind a world that was little more than a broken husk, depleted of resources and then pummeled with the most powerful weapons of a civilization able

to move between dimensions. But over the course of the next ten thousand years the planet was reshaped.

For thousands of years the Lords of Orhan had waited. They had come here as refugees and visitors, but now they invested their own Essence in the world to heal it, and they were inexorably bound to the Shadow World, and it's inhabitants to them.

The effort drained the Lords and they retreated to their abode on Orhan. The world was left in the hands of the discarded children of the K'ta'viiri. Though humans had been slaves and whipping dogs for thousands of years, it would be both foolish and misguided to speak of them as being "united through suffering". However, they were a part of a highly centralised galactic empire with a, to a large extent, unified culture. So at the beginning of the interregnum, they shared many similarities. This did not last.

The humans were spread in small groups all over the planet, and from the moment of independence this caused language and culture to drift. In addition, development were influenced by their place in the old Empire; It is possible that the Earthwardens based their civilization on knowledge salvaged from the K'ta'viirans, though they had no way of approaching the technology of old. In any case, within few generations, most similarities were as lost as their old masters.

With regards to physical features, it is impossible to know what the first humans looked like. The K'ta'viiran were known to experiment with living creatures, and it can be presumed that they designed several varieties of humans. However, it is unlikely that all of the human diversity can be attributed to K'ta'viiran tampering.

The essence flows can have strange and unpredictable effects on what they touch. Bizarre or destructive, even raw uncontrolled essence interacts with minds and desires, and this must be seen as the cause of some astoundingly useful adaptations. The Rhiani, Rasha-ai and Trogli are some examples of this phenomenon, but others exist that are even more amazing.

Erlini

The Arg Uscurac islands surrounds the Pillar of the Gods. From any of the islands, the black spire fills a quarter of the sky and stretches so high it seems to have no end. In all the world, Only the Wall of Darkness is a more prominent landmark. Even discounting the violent Essence storms whipping the Bay of the Gods, the shadow cast by the pillar makes the islands a inhospitable place. Nevertheless, 20000 years after the fall of Kadæna, a human tribe calling themselves Erlini settled there.

Not surprisingly, they made the Pillar their god, and if certain theories are correct this may have been a quite appropriate choice. In any case, for a long time their god slept, and the people led their life with no disturbances. 85,342 years before the beginning of the SEI, their lives, and the future of the world, changed forever when the Pillar erupted with an essence storm of historic dimensions.

The storm was localised and did not stretch far beyond the islands, but it had an intensity rarely observed outside the Wars of Dominion. In fact, it is possible that the unstable nature in the Bay of the Gods are the tremors of this same storm, still felt thousands of years later. The physical manifestations were violent and terrible, and virtually ripped the land apart, but even worse were the effects of the essence discharges. Rifts opened and sucked in helpless individuals, things from beyond the planes appeared while dragons danced and revelled in the elemental madness. Countless went mad as their souls were rent by the power running wild, while others had their bodies ripped apart by the same forces.

Still, not all the effects of the storm were horrible. After several weeks, the storm subsided enough to let the survivors compose themselves and flee the islands. The people who stepped ashore in Thuul were different. Most readily apparent were the physical changes; Though there are some differences among them, all Erlini are slender, with slightly elongated features and a strange 'polished' look. along with a heightened sensitivity to the essence. More subtly they show a high resistance to disease and bodily deterioration leading to extremely long agespans. .

The Erlini were, and still are, obviously more powerful than their human ancestors, and they could easily have dominated the world, if not for the changes their minds had undergone. The first Erlini did indeed set out to conquer, but this campaign floundered when their commanders forgot why they had begun, and the soldiers wandered off in pursuit of butterflies, the meaning of life or any other quixotic goal filling their mind.

This does not merely mean that they have the attention span of a six-year old, but that their entire personality shifts at random. Was this sent as punishment for their aggression, or is it a blessing preserving their sanity through countless human lifespans? Whatever the reason, this makes Erlini the most undisciplined creatures in existence. There is sense to them though; At any given time an Erlin may be perfectly rational, but their special mind gives them a unique insight in the temporariness of life, and so they have a natural inclination to live in the moment. Erlini societies are organized on that same principle; it works, but exactly how seems beyond comprehension.

Iylari

Iylari are physically similar Erlini, but this is only skin deep. If Erlini are confusing for their chaotic nature, the Iylari are the image of self-control. Where Erlini are commonly fidgety and restless, almost squirrel-like, an Iylar moves no muscle unintentionally, and often seems to be cut from stone. They could to be two different species, and yet the only significant difference between them is one of the mind.

The details surrounding the origin is a deeply kept secret, but a general outline can be deduced from their similarities. The first Iylar must have been an Erlin who stayed in one state long enough to come to understand his (or her) situation and to force his mind onto a specific. Once all mental faculties were harnessed, the potential was unlimited. The result is that an Iylar is what he wants to be; Unwanted feelings, memories or personality traits can be excised and replaced or merely be put into storage.

Comparisons to of the K'ta'viiri is natural, but only partially accurate. The K'ta'viirans created themselves by physically changing the bodies through a series of medical procedures, while the Iylari ascended through a spiritual transformation. The common trait is that both managed to make the changes stick, and effectively creating a new race.

There are three groups of Iylari. Linæri - the Singers, Loari - the Builders, Dyari - the Dominators, but do not be deceived by this division. The groups are real, as are their dominant philosophies, though this is a matter of choice only. With only a period of meditation, a Loar can be, heart and soul, a Dyar or a Linær. He can even take up the carefree outlook of an Erlin, but without any of the randomness inherent in Erlin nature. Conversely, any one of them can spend 50 years staring at a rock and be perfectly content doing it.