

Memories of Graewynn

Cultural Guide 1.0



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Cultural Guide

This document provides more information for the setting for Memories of Graewynn.

All information contained in this document is information Characters can know in game. It is not required to know all the info, but it can enhance the roleplay for the LARP.

Timeline

Of all the information within this document, the Timeline presented is generally correct regardless of who is telling it. It is a high-level overview touching on the major events across the Continent, country, or location.

Species Write Ups

Most details are general information for the average members of Species. Despite what is presented here, Player Characters (PCs) do not have to follow the descriptions of their species to the letter, but it is encouraged to take some notes from the information presented here.

Faith Write Ups

Like the Species write ups, the Faith information is presented as an overview of the average members of a Faith. Faiths can have sects who have more extreme or lax views on certain aspects of the faith. Not every faithful member will participate in their faith in the same way, this can lead to infighting among the faithful and has happened plenty of times.

Why there are no Crossbreeds

Within Memories of Graewynn, there is no crossbreeding between the different species. While they all have roughly human like forms, each species is exactly that, a different species. It is biologically impossible for different species to produce offspring. Within the species it is possible for different subgroups to reproduce together which is why the Descendent Trait exists, however, children generally take after the mother for which species subgroup the child falls into mechanically.

Player Created Sects

Players may submit a request to have a Sect of the major faiths approved. These Sects must have enough similarities to the main faith to still have some connection to it. To have a Sect approved the Player must submit the following information:

- **Sect Name**
- **Laws of the Sect** – This must use at least half the laws of the core faith, but may have different interpretations of a Law which may go against the normal interpretation. New faiths must also include new Laws which differentiate it from the main Faith.
- **Hierarchy of the Faith** – Ranks or positions held within the faith.
- **Faith Symbol** – The symbol of the Sect should be a variation of the core faith's symbols.

If the Sect is approved, then they may still use Faith Rituals for the main faith. Initiating someone into the Sect requires a Faith Initiation Ritual just like any other Faith.

New Faiths

Players may submit a new idea for a faith for approval. This faith is a new Faith and will not have a large following across the Continent. The Player submitting the approval is the founder of the Faith.

New Faiths require the following to be submitted:

- **Faith Name**
- **Laws of the Faith** – A new faith must have a minimum of 5 Laws. These are guidelines for how believers should act. The Directors will work with the Player to refine the laws into something to fit the setting as need.
- **Virtues** – Each faith requires 5 Virtues. These virtues are things each member of the faith should seek to embody.
- **Holy Symbols and/or Holy Texts** – The faith must have a holy symbol or text which members should wear in some manner.

Continent of Anthuli

Timeline

Due to the Soli being in control of a majority of the continent prior to the 5th Expansion War, the most used denotation is the Solar Calendar (SC). The Solar Calendar started when the Soli were given stewardship of Celestia by their goddess El'Yemana. Time prior to this is known as the Night Years (NY). Night years count backwards from 0 SC. Night Year 10 would be 10 years prior to Celestia's first appearance.

The Solar Calendar works off of a 12-month year with the same set up as the real-world calendar. The seasons are recognized as the following periods:

- Spring (March – May)
- Summer (June – August)
- Autumn (September – November)
- Winter (December – February)

NY 898

Oldest known documents of written history. The times before this are unknown at present. Aelf'enai are recorded to have their immortality at this point however it is unknown how long they had it.

NY 802

The Aelf'enai and Fae Courts go to war with each other, between the power of the Aelf'enai and Fae Regents, there were casualties on both sides as the Fae used their powers to put immortal Aelf'enai into an eternal sleep. Many Fae lost their lives but the fighting ended in a truce being declared.

NY 771

The Magma Roads are established and the Dwearn begin expanding their holdings across the world. Many holds are expanded into mountains on many continents. On Kuh'nal however, the Therios fought with the Dwearn and drove them out. The Magma Roads to Kuh'nal were collapsed and guardians were placed to ensure the Therios did not use them to attack other Dwearn Holds.

NY 727

Dwearn have established themselves across the world and with the Magma Roads ferry goods back and forth over vast distances. The Dwearn Golden Age begins as their cities thrive.

NY 660

A war between Aelf'enai and Dwearn is averted by the intervention of Verdanti and Fae positioning themselves against both armies. An ancient Treant brokers a peace between the two species and signs the Accord of the Leaf. The pact holds the two species will exist with the Dwearn holding to their mountains and the Aelf'enai will have dominion of the sky and plains. The Accord is set to be resigned in one century.

NY 622

Resh'enor ascends to the throne and begins work to raise the Aelf'enai capital of Ishalinoria to the sky where the Accordance of the Leaf states the Aelf'enai hold dominion.

NY 612

Ishalinoria is levitated above the world, many Aelf'enai leave the world below and travel to Ishalinoria proclaiming it as their paradise.

NY 560

During a summit between the Verdanti, Fae Courts, Aelf'enai, and Dwearn, Resh'enor proclaims the Aelf'enai have done the impossible and should be allowed to rule as they see fit. The Verdanti and Fae Courts had their own ideas and wished to negotiate. The Dwearn however openly defied the idea speaking of their own accomplishments of building cities across the world. The summit ended when Resh'enor declared war against the Dwearn ignoring the Verdanti and Fae representatives. The War of the Summit began a few months later.

NY 557

The Dwearn proved to be more of a threat than the Aelf'enai anticipated, and the war was not going well for the Aelf'enai despite their power. Since the Dwearn's resources seemed unlimited due to the Magma Roads, they withstood assault by the Aelf'enai. Driven mad by his ambitions, the Mad King Resh'enor crashes the Aelf'enai capital into the Dwearnian Hymspyd. The Aelf'enai lose their immortality and the Dwearnian Magma Road erupts cutting off contact between all Dwearn City States across the world. The Schism of the Aelf'enai occurs shortly after and the various groups of Aelf'enai head their separate ways.

NY 529

Numerous Aelf'enai travel west after discovering a new continent called Anthuli by the human locals. Many have fled from their home on the continent of Abriketh east of Anthuli. After this the Aelf'enai start new lives within the Human Kingdoms. While powerful and capable, the Aelf'enai are kept at arm's reach. Dwearn already living on Anthuli have spread the word the Aelf'enai are dangerous and mad after the Magma Roads were destroyed.

NY 462

Demonic forces from Abriketh arrive on Anthuli and begin enslaving the Human kingdoms along the eastern coast of Anthuli. Many refugees flee to the west while those not lucky enough are kept in miserable conditions and forced to build and work for demonic overlords with designs on the rest of the continent. The Human Kingdoms unite to stop the demonic spread and manage to contain it. The region became known as the Narseth Wastes which encompassed much of the eastern coast of Anthuli.

NY 403

Demonic forces on Abriketh begin a genocidal war against the Aelf'enai searching for the power which gave the Aelf'enai their immortality. Aelf'enai are taken and tortured for information. Numerous Aelf'enai submit to being transformed into a demonic crossbreed via dark rituals. The

ritual had a low chance for success, and if the ritual did not work, the result of the ritual became Aushenai.

NY 378

The Reign of Ashes drives many Verdanti from their ancient Groves. The Human kingdoms afraid of the Demonic forces begin a campaign to push strange creatures out of their territories. Many Fae, Verdanti, and Effigies are killed believed to be agents of demons trying to work their way beyond the Narseth Wastes. Verdanti find common ground with the Erce and flee there as refugees. The Fae scatter and hide among the most remote areas they can find concealing their enclaves using powerful magic.

NY 361

The Cormah Archipelago is stabilized and unite under one ruler after many long years of Cormahn clans fighting amongst themselves. United, they established themselves as merchants, traders, and pirates across the open seas.

NY 325

Therios begin using farming and the rift between traditionalist Therios and more civilized Therios begins. Traditionalist Therios begin hunting and the Carrion Hunts begin.

NY 317

Seafaring Therios run across stranded Cormah crew and assist them to get free of a reef. The Cormah tell the Therios there is another continent not too far off where they may find refuge from the Carrion Hunts. As thanks the Cormah show these Therios where to find Anthuli and the Cormah Archipelago. A pact is made by the Salt Mother and the Therios to ferry to Anthuli.

NY 315

The Therios seek refuge on Anthuli and find the Humans are somewhat welcoming especially after the Therios prove they are eager to work and assist the kingdoms with their affairs.

NY 289

Several of the Kingdoms of Anthuli go to war with each other. In time this escalates to encompassing a dozen different nations. During these conflicts many died, and several nations were subsumed into other nations. This is known as the Vengian Wars. The alliance of kingdoms keeping the demons confined to the Narseth Wastes collapsed and demons began raiding into the central parts of Anthuli furthering a dark age where advancement of society was difficult due to revolts among populaces and the threat of demonic raids forced many to struggle to just survive day to day.

Agrineas adopts an isolationist diplomatic policy closing their borders to all other nations after several betrayals during the Vengian Wars.

NY 233

Altyran Dwearn put out a call to arms to put aside petty differences and fight back against the Narseth Demons. The rallying cry brought together many common folk who

were tired of being frightened and struggling. Armed by the Altyr, many of these common folk began fighting back and protecting themselves against the Narseth Demons.

NY 214

The rise of Merrax beginning the Gethral Revolt against the Demonic forces. In a chance meeting, Merrax is approached by a Summit Dwearn convinced Merrax was a champion to free his people. Soon weapons and supplies were smuggled to Merrax and his followers to help fight against their overlords.

NY 208

An Aushenai sabotages the Ritual performed by the demons to gain the power lost by the Aelf'enai. The resultant backlash spread a wave of power across the world trapping most spiritual beings in a mirror of the world. The wave moved slowly taking roughly a year to spread across entire world. A small subset of Demons undergoes Ritual of Transublimation to escape being trapped in the Spirit World. The Ork'rus rise and flee to harsher areas where they learn to cope with being mortal and finding their way in the world.

This helped the Gethral overthrow the demons on Anthuli and gain their freedom though they did not realize exactly what was happening. During a climactic battle, Merrax disappears. Some say he ascended to become a god, while others believe he sacrifice himself to slay the Archfiend governing the Narseth Demons shattering their hierarchy. With the iron fist governing the demons gone, many Demons descended into infighting or undergoing the Ritual of Transublimation to survive.

NY 200

Having rooted out the last of the demonic strong holds and the former slaves band together and claim the Narseth Wastes as the territory of the Gethral. Viewing most other nations as cowards due to never invading and helping though they could have, the Gethral now united declared their independence of rule by any other. Due to the long-term corruption of the land, the Gethral are forced to turn to raiding the other kingdoms on their borders for resources.

NY 197

Drought forces Agrineas to lift their isolationist policies and rejoin the greater continent.

NY 149

Many of the kingdoms of Anthuli sign a treaty known as the Treaty of Hesu which established a peaceful coexistence between most of the kingdoms. The Cormah and Gethral refuse to sign the Treaty for unknown reasons, but many kingdoms undergo a renaissance period rising out of the dark times after the Vengian Wars. The Treaty of Hesu. For at least 50 years, no nation who signed the Treaty could attack each other or risk the collective nations fighting against them.

NY 99

The Treaty of Hesu ends, and several nations despite being invited to resign the Treaty instead begin attacks on each other after decades of smoldering resentment build over

some nations prosper while others suffered. Despite the sudden attacks, many Nations simply fought amongst themselves rather than banding together into a larger scale war.

NY 23

Having spent over a century living isolated lives, the Ork'rus begin making their presence known on Anthuli. At first most kingdoms saw them as invaders, many Ork'rus groups raiding for supplies. This time was dubbed the Greenskin Conflict. Thought the Ork'rus were capable fighters, they were simply outnumbered. When a noble from the Dagan region offered to hire the Ork'rus north of the kingdom to come and fight for them, the Ork'rus discovered they could use their strength to earn the supplies they needed rather than raid them. Before long many kingdoms began approaching Ork'rus camps to hire them as mercenaries or laborers.

SC 0 - The Coming of Celestia.

The Soli begin a golden age of growth and prosperity away from the majority of Anthuli. They rapidly develop many advance techniques for farming, architecture, and engineering. What other nations had taken centuries to learn, the Soli developed in isolation with the assistance of the God-Child in a few decades.

SC 35

After many decades of fighting, many of the nations of Anthuli end the fighting and find themselves in a time where no nations were fighting each other on a large scale. While many nations would rattle their swords, few seemed willing to engage in actual battle.

SC 106

Many nations thrive across Anthuli during a long era of peace and prosperity. Even with some raids occurring, most nations feel secure, and their people are generally content.

SC 129

The Cormah make contact with Aushenai who wish to flee Abriketh speaking of an empire of greenskins who have razed much of Abriketh. The Cormah ferry the Aushenai to Anthuli and several kingdoms begin to worry about the tidings coming from the east.

SC 155

Trouble begins brewing as tensions rise between the kingdoms. A drought sweeps across Anthuli leaving many hungry. The few kingdoms not heavily affected bolster their defenses as banditry rises and the common folk become desperate.

SC 157

The drought ends, but tensions remain high as many nations feel slighted their allies did not support them during a time of need.

SC 201

Cormah contact the Soli Homeland. The Soli are welcoming but grow confused as the Cormah begin to take advantage of their generosity. In time the Soli ask the Cormah to leave,

however, the Cormah refuse. Celestia gives the Revelation of Battle, and the Soli are forced to drive out the Cormah invaders. For the next few years, the Soli begin building protection along their seaside border and have to repel other attempts by pirates.

SC 294

Having grown to the point space is becoming harder to find, the Soli begin exploring the mountains of their homeland and discover ruins of Dwearn gates. Finding the ruins of the city of Jartleford, the Soli encounter a ragged populace of Dwearn struggling to survive in the carcass of their city. The Soli provide relief to the Dwearn and many Dwearn convert to Yemanism. With the Soli's help the Jartleford Dwearn begin rebuilding their home.

SC 302

With the help of the Soli the Dwearn can open the once sealed gates of their home and the Soli learn there is much more to the continent than their homeland. Within a few months missionaries leave the Homeland and begin spreading Yemanism to the surrounding Kingdoms.

SC 311-313 1st Expansion War.

Several local lords become displeased with their common folk for devoting more time to their pursuit of Yemanism and not paying their taxes or bringing in the harvest for the kingdom. The Lords asked for assistance from the nobility, but most were told to deal with it however they saw fit. The 1st Expansion War began as the local lords drove the Soli out with soldiers. This was poorly handled leaving many of their common folk even more devoted to the faith. This war lasted roughly a year

SC 319

Having retreated to their Homeland, the Soli make new strides in their tactics and methods. They leave the Homeland again and begin their mission work anew.

SC 333-334 2nd Expansion War.

After learning to fight back against smaller groups, the Soli's missionary work spread farther than before. However, regional lords became distressed at the amount of political sway the Yemanists were gaining. In time the nobles conspired to root out the Yemanists. Several nations outlawed Yemanism and tried to force any Yemanists whether Soli or local out of the country or worse. This persecution drove many Yemanist groups to meet in secret. In time rebellions broke out across many nations. The most famous of these incidents was the poisoning of several prominent missionaries by High King Keldor of Nuulok. The 2nd Expansion War ended in victory for the Soli after about 6 months. Time was spent to consolidate their influence and power and rebuild for loyal Yemanists before new missions were started to convert beyond the lands the Yemanists had taken over. At present, the Soli controlled about 15% of the continent.

SC 368-382 3rd Expansion War.

Over the course of the last 50 years, the Soli had converted several Nations peacefully and absorbed them into their

fold. Neighboring nations become concerned by the growing strength of the Soli Empire and banded together to form the Court of Stags. Launching a preemptive strike, the Court of Stags drove the Soli and Yemanists back with lightning strikes and coordinated assaults from several directions. This was a new kind of warfare for the Soli, and they were not prepared. It was not until the Orders of Knights were formed by the Soli to fight back against this new threat. Historians say the war ended in a stalemate for both sides. Borders were redrawn and several kingdoms now found they had populations of Yemanists within their lands. In time this would prove to be their undoing.

SC 412

Over the next two generations, Yemanists infiltrated the Court of Stags and converted many of the nobility who would one day take the throne of those nations. In a coordinated effort, many of the successors overthrew their parents and declared their nations to the Soli Empire. This resulted in the Soli now controlling nearly 50% of Anthuli.

SC 455 - 477 - 4th Expansion War.

Not relying on other Nations, the Nations of Dagan, Osgarth, a cluster of small nations north of Erce, and Agrineas launch separate attacks on the Soli. The fighting was bloody and in truth could be categorized as four separate wars at the time. Fighting on four fronts, the Soli did make some headway when they conquered Agrineas utilizing war constructs for the first time. Despite taking heavy losses, the Soli did end up conquering the nations opposing them. They accomplished this by employing alchemical weapons which were poorly understood by the frontline troops. These weapons tainted the land and spread dangerous poisons into the water making certain regions barren and without ways to grow food. By the end of the 4th Expansion War, the Soli now control approximately 75% of the continent. The only nations not under their sway are the Narseth Wastes of the Gethral, Erce, Agrineas, Altyr, and the Cormah Archipelago. By the end of the War, Celestia had seen the horrors these weapons brought to the world and outlawed their use forever.

SC 462 – Though the Soli were still fighting, they conquered Agrineas early in the campaign. A fanatical Yemanist attempts to build a new Soli capital outside the Homeland as a symbol of devotion to Celestia and El'Yemana. However, the sanctification ritual is sabotaged by Erce and Verdanti slave laborers. The Ritual causes a wave of undeath and destruction across the entirety of Agrineas. The first sentient undead arise and turn on the Soli driving them out of Agrineas entirely. This event becomes known as Hektram's Folly. Even the landscape of Agrineas is twisted into a great deal of swamp land.

The newly dead Agrineans withdraw to determine what they will do with this new state of undeath and the thousands of mindless undead now roaming their country.

SC 465 – As undead pour out of Agrineas, the Soli task the Order of Fronii Knights to hold the line against the swarming hordes. Believing there are charge with a holy

task, the Knights begin constructing the Wall of Sacraments to hold back the worst of the hordes. This massive undertaking constructs a miles long wall along the border of Erce and Agrineas. Using many construction Constructs, the wall takes almost 30 years to complete, but ends up spanning hundreds of miles.

SC 491 – The Free Peoples alliance of Erce, the Gethral, and Altyr sends a formal declaration to the Soli they will not tolerate their missionaries or attempts to take control of their nations. If the Soli do not cease and desist, they will face the full might of the collective nations and will not hold back. The Soli arrogantly dismiss the warning and begin their cycle of conversion once again. Any missionary, emissary, or other representative who crossed the borders of the Free People's Alliance was immediately killed and sent back to the Soli lands.

SC 492 - 504 - 5th Expansion War.

After numerous occasions where Yemanist or Soli representatives were killed, the Soli declare war on the Free People's Alliance. Their initial estimations of the Alliance were they were not a threat, however, this quickly proved to be an error in judgement. The Erce fought with a surprising efficiency and ferocity many of the once peaceful Septs of Erce had never displayed. Many Gethral traveled to Erce to train them in how to fight in new ways. Altyr supplied both the Gethral and Erce with new weapons, equipment, and supplies giving them an unexpected edge.

At the borders of the Narseth, the Gethral had been fighting as mercenaries with other kingdoms against the Soli for years, so they were accustomed to the Soli's way of fighting and had trained in ways to fight against it. Even constructs were not a surefire way to win against the Gethral. The Altyr had constructed killing grounds and trench networks to employ their latest black powder guns to tear through Soli lines as they approached.

As the Soli recoiled from the combined strength of the Free People's Alliance, they struggled to fight back while trying to allocate resources to the right places. Groups from the Free People's Alliance had infiltrated behind the Soli lines and disrupted their supply chains often sending the wrong supplies to battle lines or ambushing troops marching to the fronts and delaying them buying time for the main forces to fight against dwindling numbers of Soli troops.

The war continued to escalate as both sides began to employ more dangerous weapons. The Soli began churning out war constructs with the aid of the Jartleford Dwearn and employing more esoteric weapons such as the Exorcist. These weapons proved to be highly effective at breaking the spirits of many of the Free People's Alliance. The first use of an Exorcist was on swathes of undead piling up along the Wall of Sacraments. In a blink, thousands of undead were wiped from existence. The Exorcist was only used one other time, a small cadre of Yemanist fanatics smuggled one to the Altyran Mountains and used it to carve open a huge portion of the mountain exposing the Altyran city underneath to the sky above. While most Altyrans were

heartbroken by this, they held hoping the war would end soon.

The Erce, being pushed back by constructs awoke ancient trees they believed to hold the spirits of their ancestors to fight alongside them. These enormous trees became an unstoppable wall crushing and killing everything in their path as they walked forward through wave after wave of Soli construct and soldiers. The carnage wrought by this event is believed to be what gave birth to creatures known as Sylvagore, malicious plant creatures which hungered for the flesh and blood of the various species.

Originating from somewhere not far from the Gethral borders, a group begins summoning demons using a small village as sacrifices. The demons and their followers then spread to other nearby villages doing the same. This process spreads like a plague moving across the northern parts of Anthuli gaining momentum with each new village sacrificed to it. Soon the Daemontide begins rolling through entire towns and even a few cities. As its numbers swell, it becomes a true threat forcing the Soli to pull back from the fronts as the Daemontide gets closer and closer to the Homeland.

When the tide hits the Mythos Gate, the fiercest battle ever seen by the Soli begins. With the demons stealing souls of the defenders, a young alchemist uses an untested theory to try and anchor the souls to the defenders. The souls are not stolen, but defenders who die have their souls trapped in their armor and they continue to fight not realizing they had died. A desperate charge of an Order of Knights punches through the demonic horde and engages the creature leading the Daemontide. In a truly epic battle, the demon is slain, and the horde begins to falter before it is routed entirely. However, the Daemontide left a scar across the land, and numerous demons fled into the wilds to hunt and grow their power.

With their Homeland threatened and the battles going poorly, the Soli military sent out orders for all Soli to retreat across the Maltenat River. On their way, the soldiers were to gather people of influence, skill, and Yemanist clergy and evacuate them across the river. This action left a huge swathe of Anthuli without leadership, skilled workers, and guidance. Many saw this act as a betrayal by the Empire. Many Yemanists left behind gave up their faith and instead gathered to try and find some way to live with the world as it was changing.

Leaving such a huge territory undefended, the Free People's Alliance did not have the resources or people to hold it and contain the Soli beyond the river they had chosen. With a heavy heart, most of the Free People's Alliance was forced to return to their countries and tend to their wounded and rebuild after the long war.

In time the land abandoned by the Soli became known as Graewynn.

SC 504-511 – In the seven years following the Soli Exodus, many small villages have been abandoned as people in

Graewynn are forced to defend themselves against demons, Sylvagore, undead, and the multitude of bandits which have appeared in the power vacuum. Word is spreading of several budding nations forming in Graewynn, however, few of them have the strength to truly contend with the nations of the 5th Expansion War.

Human Nations of Anthuli

For most of recorded history, Humans were the most populous species on the continent of Anthuli. However, as time went on other Species also came to represent a significant population. Before the Expansion Wars and the Soli's campaign to convert the continent, Anthuli was home to dozens of nations. For many years these nations squabbled among themselves over resources, territory, religion and any other reason for people to fight. However, one by one those nations were converted and absorbed into the Soli Empire. As the Yemanist Clergy rapidly replaced culture, currency, and customs with their practices, many of those nations were lost to time. As of the present, only a few Human nations exist outside the Soli Empire.

Average Human Lifespan: 40 years

Maximum Human Lifespan: Approximately 80 years

Soli Theocratic Empire

Several centuries before the events of Memories of Graewynn, the Soli beseeched their Goddess, El'Yemana, to bestow her blessing on them. According to the holy texts of the Yemanist Faith, El'Yemana had placed the Soli in an isolated area to keep them safe from the outside world, yet they were unaware of how peaceful their lives were compared to the world beyond the Jartleford Mountain range dividing the Soli from the rest of the continent of Anthuli. Seeing her chosen people begging to be shown a sign, El'Yemana bestowed her daughter, Celestia upon the ancient Soli as a physical sign of the Soli being her chosen people. For many decades the Soli prospered in their isolated homeland as Celestia showed them how to turn their already bountiful land into a sliver of paradise.

The God Child Celestia

The holy texts of the Yemanist faith, claim Celestia was no older than a toddler when she was entrusted to the Soli. Yet she could speak and while innocent, was smarter and wiser than even the greatest sages. Over time many flocked to Celestia to learn from her and spread the teachings to others. Over the centuries, each time Celestia provided what the Soli call Revelations, Celestia would visibly age. The more profound or potent the teaching the more she would age. In the current times, Celestia appears to be roughly ten years old. Protected in the capital of the Soli, Segog, Celestia spends her days teaching others and watching over her people.

When Celestia was bestowed to the Soli, she appeared as a 5-year-old girl with hair said to shine like polished silver, her eyes golden and strange. Celestia's skin is said to be alabaster white, and her voice inspires peace and joy in those that hear it. Her innocence of the world was clear, but it left her pure and kindhearted. Those that had encountered Celestia could see the divine nature within her.

Legends say that Celestia is the product of El'Yemana's union with the first King of the Soli, Elias Dawningstar. Having inherited a vast store of her mother's knowledge, Celestia has taught her people secrets of the world and how to improve their lives in innumerable ways. From farming to black smithing, to philosophy, art, and science Celestia has given her people a distinctive edge over most other nations. However, the mountains around their homeland kept the Soli relatively free of war, disease, or other issues.

For almost four centuries the Soli enjoy a Golden era of prosperity, advancement, and development.

The Homeland of Sol

Bounded on three sides by the imposing Jartleford Mountain range, only the most daring even considered trying to find their way through those mountains with their steep drops and frigid peaks. The western side of Sol meets the Eriona Ocean, which for many was believed to be the only way in or out of the region. Yet with the prosperity the Soli felt, none wished to leave. Within a generation, the Soli had a utopian home, no one raised a hand against others, disputes were handled with discussion and compassion.

Arrival of the Outsiders

This changed when a group of seafarers arrived on the shores of Sol. While the details change from account to account, these people were new and strange to the Soli. A conflict arose, the exact reason why is lost to time, but the Soli who had no experience with conflict at this point found themselves at risk.

Celestia then bequeathed the Revelation of Battle to the Soli. Many were terrified of the concept, but the Soli knew this must be. Grim faced with the task from the God Child, the Soli fought back and drove the invaders, returning them to the sea. Once the invaders were gone, the Soli held a celebration to El'Yemana and Celestia to give thanks for preserving their way of life. Many of the Soli began to realize there were other people out in the world who did not know of El'Yemana's Light. They felt it was their duty to go forth and teach others. Yet this undertaking was not something they were ready for yet, and once again they went to Celestia for her wisdom. Over the next two generations, the Soli prepared for making their way into the greater world.

The Jartleford Dwearn (Yartle-ford)

During this time, a group of miners discovered a passage in the Jartleford Mountains which gave way to massive caverns and what looked to be the ruins of a city. Explorers flocked to the newly discovered caverns but were surprised by who they found within. Huddling in squalor, they discovered the last few hundred Dwearn of the Jartleford. According to what few scraps of their history remained, the Jartleford revealed their city had once been a mighty metropolis.

When the Magma Road collapsed, the city was filled with poisonous gas leaving many Jartleford gasping for life and all known access to the mountain collapsed. What few Jartleford survived clung to safe pockets of clean air and grew what little food they could using cracks in the exterior of the mountain to provide light for meager crops. Numerous generations were forced to live in these conditions until much of their heritage was forgotten believing they were the only survivors of the Dwearn species, they stubbornly hung onto life.

Feeling it was their duty to help these people, the Soli provided food, water, medicine, and teaching to the Jartleford survivors. In time, as thanks for the Soli's help, the Jartlefords learned of the Soli's desire to spread the word of El'Yemana. Guiding the Soli to the last of the Mythos Gates, massive gates which once led into the Jartleford Kingdom, they presented the Soli with a passage to the rest of Anthuli. Soon planning began to send out missionaries to teach others about El'Yemana and her wisdom. Meanwhile teams of Soli and Jartleford began clearing out the ruins of the city and clearing passages to allow smoother access from one side of the mountains to the other. With this, the Soli not only had a gateway to the rest of the continent, but their home would be protected by the mountains and Dwearn within.

Over the next several generations, expeditions were sent out to spread the Yemanist faith. At first, they were met and well received. The people beyond the mountains were interested in hearing about Sol and the generosity of El'Yemana. Before long however, local lords began to question these strangers' motives and outlawed Yemanism. When pressed to leave, the Soli retreated to their homeland and sought out advice from Celestia. Within a few years the Soli would reemerge better equipped to handle any situation. This pattern continued as the Yemanist word spread, catching like wildfire with common folk. At times it did spark violence when the old regimes would fight back claiming the Soli were subversive and trying to undermine their rule. This process continued from villages to towns, to cities, even to entire nations.

Doctrine of the Dawn

Each time the Soli returned from pulling back their influence, they returned more capable, more prepared. In time their methods went from peaceful missionary work, to convert or be forced out of the lands the Soli claimed. Those who converted were welcomed, while any resistance was driven out. As the Soli began to control more and more land, they had to adapt to ruling areas where the local culture and economy was vastly different from what they were used to handling.

In time this became the Doctrine of the Dawn. When an area converted to Yemanism, the Soli would collect old currency, insignias of former rulers or national monuments and replace them with their own currency, symbols, and monuments. As dawn broke over a new region, it would be transformed into the image of a Soli province. This change often shook the convictions of converts who wanted to hold

onto the past and remember the traditions of their homelands. Many became refugees fleeing to other towns or even countries.

The Doctrine of the Dawn evolve over time to wipe away most of the previous culture including holidays and traditions. The farther the Soli spread however, they encountered more resistance to the Doctrine. Further from the Homeland several holidays and traditions from the previous culture exist but have been adapted to the Yemanist faith.

The Expansion Wars

This exodus forewarned many nations knowing they were likely next in line to be tempted with Yemanist beliefs. Thus began the Expansion Wars. At present five Expansion Wars have been fought. Each one bloodier than the last. As the Yemanist faith spread, the King of a nation known as Unalia took offense when his servants began attending more Soli sermons than performing their duties. Irrked by the insolence of his subjects, the King outlawed Yemanism and ordered his soldiers to arrest or drive out all trueborn Soli. While at the time the Soli could handle bandits or a few bullies, they did not have the capabilities to fight against an organized fighting force. Yet within a few years of being driven out of the kingdom, the Soli returned after many of the converts had fled to their holdings outside the Jartlefords. Driven by the belief they were rescuing El'Yemana's followers, an armed group of trueborn Soli and converts marched upon Unalia. In the days that followed, the old King was overthrown as converts began a wave of sabotage leaving the King's soldiers without supplies or waking up to fanatical followers with knives at their throats. This first true conquest enflamed the Soli's passion for their mission to convert all others to Yemanism.

Nearly two decades later, the Second Expansion War began under similar circumstances. The High Keldor of Nuulok invited several prominent Yemanist missionaries to a dinner in their honor saying he wished to learn of their ways and possibly convert. However, this was a trap set to remove the leaders of the missionary movement. During the dinner the missionaries were poisoned. The High Keldor had the heads of the dead missionaries sent back to the Soli with a warning stuffed in the mouth of each head. The warning declared the Soli as invaders he would meet on the field of battle if they did not leave Nuulok. Roused by righteous vengeance, the Soli rallied their people and attacked Nuulok with a massive force. Within a few months, the High Keldor was captured and executed for inhumane treatment of believers. While the shortest of the Expansion Wars, the Second Expansion War set the tone for much of the way Soli dealt with other nations, causing their methods to shift to more aggressive conversions or forcing non-believers out.

The Third Expansion War was against a confederation of nations known as the Court of Stags. Each of the countries involved had hundreds of refugees warning them of the Soli's intentions. Not wishing to be next, the Court of Stags launched a pre-emptive strike against the Soli. Caught

unawares, the Soli were driven back. Many believed the Soli would be driven back to their homeland, however, a new militant order of the Yemanist Church was formed employing the magic of Thaumaturgy and power of Faith against the Court of Stags. Some claim the Third Expansion War was a stalemate, with the Soli suing for peace after neither side could make headway against the other for nearly two years. Yet in time, the Soli slowly built followings in each of the capitals of the nation's claiming to be of the Court of Stags. A decade after the Third Expansion War officially ended, the Court of Stags had fallen slowly as heirs to the throne revealed they had converted to Yemanism. Many monarchs were overthrown by their converted children, only to find their people also bearing the sunburst iconography of Yemanism.

The Fourth Expansion War was a bloody affair and historians find it difficult to categorize it as a true war. The Soli found themselves in a battle on four sides with separate nations. Years of bitter blood had left the nations opposed to allying after seeing what happened to the Court of Stags, leaving them each pursuing battle with the Soli on their own terms. This asymmetrical warfare stretched the Soli thin. Not having a single enemy to direct their might against left them scrambling to protect their holdings in several territories. The deployment of alchemical weapons soon left large swathes of land poisoned, making it difficult for anyone to live in those areas. One by one their enemies fell as food stores dwindled and the common folk rebelled. Seeing the devastation her people wrought, Celestia decreed all such alchemic weaponry would be destroyed and never used again. For the first time in the Soli's history, the God Child had been disgusted with how they had used what she taught them.

Despite the violence of the Fourth Expansion War, it paled in comparison to the Fifth Expansion war. Fought against the combined might of the last three nations not converted to the Yemanist Faith, the Soli learned what a truly coordinated and desperate enemy could do. Atrocities were committed on both sides during the Fifth Expansion War. From the release of the Daemontide, the detonation of the first Exorcist device on Mount Altyr, and the events of the Walking Forest, each side fought a bloody battle taking hundreds of thousands of lives. When the Battle of the Mythos Gates ended, the Soli commanded all trueborn Soli to return to the Homeland and established a perimeter six hundred miles from the Mythos Gates. Within a few weeks many influential individuals in most of the Soli controlled lands fled, leaving the common folk without leadership, direction, or a connection to the Soli.

Segog, the City of Progress

The Capital of the Soli Empire is Segog. Built on the site where Celestia was entrusted to Elias Dawningstar, Segog is the most advanced city in the known world. Utilizing the most recent revelations of architecture and engineering provided by the God-Child, Segog is a veritable utopian dream. Wide roads are filled with people at any given time as buildings several stories tall dot the landscape. Hundreds of pureblood Soli living in each of these marvels

of design work and pray within temples built with latticed glass and crystal.

At the center of the city is the Temple of Illumia Eternal. This massive temple is the place where Celestia resides protected behind several thick fortress walls and guarded by the most powerful Constructs, Thaumaturges, and the Twilight Guard. The golden domes of the Temple can be seen when the light catches them right across the lands of Sol. Boasting a reputation of never having been breached by any foe, the Temple is believed the most secure place in the known world.

Culture

The Soli culture is steeped in their religion and the belief they are the chosen people of their Goddess. Appreciating fine art, science, and piety, many Soli act benevolent and simply want to share the light of Yemanism with others. However, arrogance and pride are not sins within Yemanism, they are in fact considered virtues. Trueborn Soli are the elite among all the Faithful and look down on Converts because they were not born into the religion. In the minds of many Trueborn, Converts are merely sycophants trying to save their own heathen souls. While this is a common belief, not all are prideful or cruel about it. There are many groups within the Soli providing food, aid, medicine, and other help to all who seek it, even heathens. This dichotomy is represented at all levels of Soli culture and can be quite confusing to outsiders. The more directly arrogant and prideful Soli tend to be in positions of power, while the compassionate ones tend to remain only just above the average peasant.

Home life for the Soli can be a turbulent affair. While priding themselves on knowledge and faith, the Soli do have a drive about them giving them an edge, they work tirelessly to meet their goals, however, it does often make their home lives difficult. Working long hours, when they return home, behind closed doors it is not uncommon for Soli, a normally dispassionate people, to argue. Soli believe family conflict is no one else's business and should never be displayed in public. It is borderline taboo to spread family business among even other Soli, and utterly alien to consider discussing family business in front of heathens.

Almost all Soli are deeply devout and attend every religious ceremony they can. This includes most government functions so the Soli do keep up to date on what's going on not only with their community, but also their souls. This is another facet to the Soli industriousness; they force themselves to be involved with the community. Which in turn, betters the whole rather than the individual. Trueborn feel they have risen above this and live lives of luxury and decadence. While few Trueborn would be caught dead disgracing their religion, they do bend the rules for their own means. Order, Reason, and Faith in those ideals is what drives Soli society, they look down on emotional displays especially in public. Allowing passions to rule life is a path to chaos in the minds of the Soli. They would much rather have a safe and comfortable life than take risks physically and emotionally.

Constructs also play a unique role in the Soli society. Many are used for heavy labor, but more sophisticated ones such as ones put in charge of caring for children are almost revered as people themselves. Some Soli talk with mindless constructs as if they were close friends. While at large this is considered an emotional display, many Soli do it regularly to help alleviate building stress.

Music

Soli music often uses a lot of wind and stringed instruments. Their preferred style of music is often calming, peaceful and embodies the ideals of light, wisdom, and belief. Songs among the Soli almost always reference Celestia, El'Yemana, or wisdom in some way. Lyrical chanting is also a common theme in Soli music.

Foreigners often call Soli music peaceful but would rarely attribute the words spirited or energetic to Soli music. Despite their rapid progress and development, most Soli songs are often slow, drawn out, and have been known to put others to sleep.

Artwork

Soli artwork is considered some of the best on Anthuli. With their attention to detail coupled with a fervent wish to appease the God-Child or goddess, Soli artists are known for an impressive level of detail and realism to their work. From landscapes, to portraits, to murals. Many Soli buildings have intricate murals depicting favored scriptures in visual form, glorifying the God-Child, or stunning landscapes often depicting the sun and people as a primary element. Soli value realism in artwork and do not put much stock in abstract images. Precision and technique are praised by Soli artists rather than creativity or metaphor.

Geometric shapes and proportion are also highly prized among accomplished artists in Sol. Critics will view not perfectly straight lines or round circles as a flaw in the artist's skill. Foreigners have attributed a sense of perfectionism to Soli work where even small deviations are viewed as monstrous disasters in an artist's work.

Clothing

Since their home is warm and temperate, Soli clothing is loose and flowing. Trueborn favor expensive clothing made from exotic materials, precious metals and stones, and exotic alluring styles. While the Soli consider themselves modest, they do tend to accentuate their physical form when possible. Some Trueborn have even been heard to say they are showing the Converts what true Soli look like.

The two most common styles for men are the *aiga*, a loose-fitting robe that is worn with little else. It typically hangs down to the knees and is decorated with embroidery or jewelry. The other style is loose fitting short pants that are tied just below the knees. The fabric of the pants hangs below the tie. This is accompanied by a loose, long-sleeved shirt. The front and back of the shirt are short, usually exposing the men's midriff.

Women among the Trueborn tend to wear similar clothing to the males but it is styled humbler. There is a type of ceremonial dress called *thenru* that to outsiders looks like little more than wide ribbons wrapped around the upper body typically leaving the upper back and cleavage exposed. This style is more risqué among the Soli women but has been on the rise.

Some fashions from the various convert Nations have also become popular. Hats have become a symbol of social standing among the Soli. Many times, the Soli will go so far as to make ostentatious hats for offices or special occasions. A skilled haberdasher will find the Soli pay well for their art.

Language

The Soli language has spread far and wide, becoming the second most spoken language in Anthuli. The language is very formulaic and uses an intuitive set of conjugations to change the tenses of their words. However, the written Soli language is rather complicated and those who know how to use it well are often seen as being educated. The written language known as Sunsign, relies on symbols that use slashes and positioning in order to convey ideas. Often these symbols may include other symbols that change the meaning of the word itself. For instance, night might be written with the symbols for "Not Day " rather than giving Night it's own special symbol.

What makes the language difficult is there are three forms of it. Dawnsign is the oldest form of the Soli language and is complex and difficult to master because the positioning of symbols as well as their combinations are very easy to misunderstand. Most religious texts, technical manuals and great literary works are written in Dawnsign. Morningsign is the modern Soli language, it is a little more simplified removing the most abstract of the positioning parts of Dawnsign. This is mostly used as the common language for Sol, including amongst the converts. Finally, Noonsign is the most basic form of the language, it can be used to teach the basics of Morningsign and even Dawnsign, but few outside the Soli empire ever move past Noonsign. Those that use Noonsign may seem simple or struggle with language by those that fluently speak Morningsign and downright incomprehensible to those speaking Dawnsign.

Hierarchy

Among the Soli there is a hierarchy of nobility comingled with faith leaders. It is not uncommon for a government official to also be an ordained member of the Yemanist faith.

Among the nobility of those not ordained, titles typically become more complex with the greater stature the individual noble wields. A simple Lord, Lady or Noble title generally means the individual owns land but does not have great sway in local courts and likely do not have pull beyond the province they call home. Many Soli nobility include a duty along with their title, for instance a Lord

Mayor is not only a noble, but also is the Mayor of a town. A Lord Artificer would be a noble who primarily works as an Artificer.

As the noble ascends, they are granted a greater title to befit their rank and standing. A High Lord Artificer for example is considered a higher ranked but still mid-tier noble. These nobles typically govern other Lords over a particular region. Generally, there are a few High Nobles per province. Some examples of a mid-tier noble's title could include:

High, Proud, Wise, Greater, or Rising.

The highest ranks of nobles are called Solar Nobles. Their titles include a solar or alchemical reference in their title. Solar Nobles follow a stricter ranking system than others mirroring the Yemanist faith. The ranks are as follows:

Dawn Nobles are on the level of a provincial governor.

Morning Nobles oversee three or more provinces.

Noon Nobles are the highest-ranking nobles outside the Homeland. Those not of pure Soli blood can never rise higher than a Noon Noble.

High Sun Nobles ironically hold less true power than Morning or Noon Nobles. This title comes from the houses within the Homeland. However, a High Sun Noble can expect even Noon Nobles to carefully consider their words and requests. It is uncommon for High Sun Nobles to leave the Homeland, however some bored with the court of Sol do so seeking adventure. Most High Sun Nobles are viewed as spoiled children by Nobles who do the real work within the Empire.

Setting Sun Nobles are pure-blooded Soli who fulfill a function like Dawn Nobles. The primary difference is their provinces are much smaller, but within the Homeland itself. Setting Sun Nobles are the ruling elite within the Homeland. Each Setting Sun Noble is influential even within the Homeland and their words are considered law outside the homeland.

Though there are only a handful of Sunset Nobles even in the Homeland, they are the true power within the Empire. With vast wealth, connections, and influence, the Sunset nobles make up a ruling council within the Homeland dictating nearly all actions within the Empire itself.

Twilight Nobles are known to be direct descendants of Elias Dawningstar. Their task is not to rule the Empire, but instead they are the personal attendants and stewards of Celestia herself. They have the right to give orders to any Soli and it is expected to be followed without question. They are regarded as speaking with the voice of Celestia herself. The Twilight Nobles rarely leave the Allsun Temple where Celestia resides, let alone leave the Homeland.

Soli Military

The Soli's military is comprised of four major forces. Each force has its own purpose and function. Each of these forces is organized by the Revelations of Battle handed down through the ages.

Soli Irregular Armies

The first and considered the lowest prestige is the Irregular Armies. Made up of converts from outside of Sol, these soldiers were allowed to keep their martial traditions.

Despite the Doctrine of the Dawn washing away nearly all other traditions, the Soli allowed converted nations to retain their fighting styles to widen the types of soldiers they could command. Locals train in their types of combat giving each Irregular Army its own strengths and weaknesses. Most members of the Irregular Armies are not expertly trained and serve as little more than militia. However, each Irregular Army falls under the Combined Arms Combat Training Doctrine. This Doctrine requires each Irregular Army to train with other Irregular Armies at least twice a year to learn to fight with one another. Despite this, the Irregular Army makes up roughly half of the Soli's troops in war.

Soli Crusading Army

Ranked as actual soldiers are the Soli Crusading Army. Trained and drilled relentlessly, each member of the Soli Crusading Armies must prove themselves capable and prove their devotion by going through grueling training both in body and spirit. By the end of their training, Soli Crusaders learn to fight with sword, rondel dagger, shield, cartridge guns, and long spear.

Squads consist of 12 Soldiers: 10 fighters, one unit leader, and one member of the Yemanist Clergy, typically a Morning Dean. Sword and Shield units are known as Line Squads tasked with holding points and defending other units and are usually armed in brigandine armor. Units comprised of Cartridge Rifles are known as Rifleman Squads and only wear leathers. These units are generally the center of most Soli formations and lay down fire as enemies' approach. Finally Spear Squads are the offense coupled with a Line Unit's defensive tactics. Spear Squads are generally armored lightly from the waist down but wear a breastplate with segmented pauldrons and enclosed helmets.

All Soli Crusaders learn to use the rondel as a secondary melee weapon primarily used for quick stabs and blocking attacks. These soldiers make up roughly 25% of the Soli's forces.

The Holy Orders of Knights

Further bringing the Yemanist faith to bear, the Holy Orders of Knights are considered the most powerful mortal soldiers in the Soli military. Orders exist both inside and outside the Homeland, each with their own unique customs, combat styles, and tactics. Each Order is founded as a reward to the greatest of Soli heroes to pass down their skills and teachings to future generations.

The Holy Orders train in all manner of weapons and typically favor heavier weapons than the Soli Crusading Army. Armor for a Knight ranges from chainmail all the way up to heavy full plate armor. Each Order is fanatically faithful to the Yemanist faith, and each Knight is trained to utilize not only martial weapons, but the weapons of faith. Utilizing faith and Thaumaturgy, the Holy Orders are deadly

opponents armed with the best equipment the Soli have at their disposal.

Despite some Holy Orders being formed of converts, each Holy Order of Knights member is considered an equal in standing regardless of their bloodline. Each has pledged everything they have and are, to Celestia.

The most famous of the Holy Orders is the Order of the Breaking Dawn. Hailed as the heroes of the Battle of the Mythos Gate, their Order spear headed the charge to slay the leader of the Daemontide. Though they suffered heavy losses, it is said the leader of the Order at the time was granted a weapon by Celestia herself which could kill even spiritual beings permanently. Rumors circulate the leader was slain and another picked up the weapon to slay the demon. Stories conflict of which of the Knights landed the killing blow, but each of them is hailed as a great hero of the Empire.

The Holy Orders only comprise about 10 percent of the Soli Military.

The Constat Corp

Fairly new compared to the other armies, the Constat Corp is a force made of constructs built using advanced artifice revealed to the Soli by the God-Child. Each Construct is designed to be relentless, tireless, and durable. Serving as line breakers, construction laborers, and heavy combatants. Employed after the Third Expansion War, each war has only increased the funding of the Constat Corp expanding their use and numbers. Squads within the Corp are made up of three to five constructs and an Artificer. The Artificer is charged with maintaining the constructs and giving them orders to follow. Each Construct of a Hand will only follow the orders of their Artificer or their superiors. Artificers each hold the rank of a commissioned officer and can also take charge of Irregular units or Soli Crusaders squads as necessary.

Battle Constructs utilize deadly blows and can be fitted with a disturbing array of weapons both mundane and magical. Even one basic Battle Construct can fight several mortal opponents at once and come through only requiring minimal maintenance.

Heraldry

Much of Soli Heraldry involves stylized variations of a sunburst, rising or setting sun, stars, or symbols of knowledge. Things such as quills, books, scroll work, and tinker's tools are common sights on Soli Heraldry. Pure-Blood Soli symbols typically range from white to other warm colors. More earthen colors are left for convert units and Nobles. One standard of Soli heraldry is no family symbol will ever be on a field of black or other colors close to black.

Erce (AER-cee)

Less of a nation and more of a vast collection of peoples who have decided to live in harmony with nature rather than seek progress, the nation of Erce is more of a democracy than most other nations. Each group, tribe, sept or collective sends representatives to meeting places called the Gathering of Leaves where they settle internal disputes and attempt to aid their neighbors. More chaotic than some would believe, the Ercen have used this system where a representative of their people goes and negotiates with other representatives to get aid and supplies as needed. Some of the more aggressive groups within Erce have taken it upon themselves to fight back against the Soli who have targeted Erce due to the abundant natural resources present in the region.

The Coalition of the Wild

Alongside the many Humans within Erce are Verdanti, Therios, and many members of the Fae. All are welcome and participate in governing the nation alongside the humans seen as equals. From this the Ercen draw strength of many ideas often tackling issues from multiple avenues. Many within the nation do not wish for war, but after the atrocities committed by Hektram in Agrineas and the kidnapping of many citizens of Erce, no Ercen is willing to take the chance another Hektram will not be put in charge of their home should the Soli take control. Ercen also have an informal faith seeking to honor and protect nature; the endless need for resources to fuel the Soli war machine has come into direct conflict with the beliefs of nearly all Ercen. While outsiders see the Erce as a disorganized force, they excel at working in several different groups all working towards a similar goal. Each group within the nation has their own variation of this faith, but it has been collectively called the Moonsong.

Among the remaining free peoples, the Erce are considered one of the more accepting of outsiders and willing to take in refugees from other places. Many fled from Graewynn to find homes within Erce. Despite some initial friction, the Erce have made accommodations for refugees which may not be quite the standard some of them are used to; however, they are provided sanctuary and care from the war-torn regions of the continent.

The Land of Forest and Jungle

The nation of Erce is a verdant place covered almost entirely in forests in the northern part which eventually transition into thick jungles in the southern portion of the country. The landscape is covered in hills and valleys making the landscape nearly impossible to traverse with large forces. There are cliffs obscured by vegetation, pits of quicksand, and in the furthest south nests of poisonous creatures amid the rain forests.

In addition to the dangerous landscape, the local flora and fauna are dangerous as well. Without a guide, the unwise are likely to ingest something poisonous or try to hunt beasts far cleverer than most other predators. The only non-natural things found within Erce are a series of ancient

temples scattered throughout the country. Erce and the rest of their coalition have taboos of leaving them as they are, but outsiders often are willing to risk whatever dangers may be inside to explore these temple sites. Legends of the temples say they were built in the earliest days of human development; however, nature cursed the arrogant ancestors of the Erce for marring sacred sites. The curse is said to punish any who enter the temple grounds.

The curse is said to cause great misfortune to manifest for those who trespass on these sacred places. A multitude of different things have been blamed on the curse. Sudden waves of sickness across the region, surges in aggression from local predators, some even blame the invasion by the Soli on the curses from the temples.

The Septs of Erce

Rather than towns or even cities, Erce is dotted by villages called Septs. Septs are gatherings of Erce, Verdanti, Therios, and Fae. Most septs are approximately 60% Erce Humans, 20% Therios, 10% Verdanti and 10% Fae. Some Septs differ in this ratio or are comprised of only one species. The average Sept is comprised of simple tents, single story wooden structures, and generally have a central gathering area where people work and celebrate together.

Most Septs number as little as 20, to a few hundred people. Even the larger Septs could easily be torn down and moved given some forewarning. Between the beliefs of Moonsong and the occasional natural disaster or migration of dangerous animals, most Septs are prepared to move if threatened. This has proven massively frustrating to Soli invaders being unable to find villages which can be moved if the village is warned.

Since the 4th Expansion War many Septs keep a number of scouts out to watch for threats from the Soli. With their knowledge of the terrain and locations of their village scouts can often relay the information to ensure their people have ample time to move if necessary.

Cradle of the Moonsong

Across Erce, many Septs follow the Moonsong faith. It is said Moonsong originated in Erce. The inhabitants of Erce all have a close connection to nature which lends some credence to the stories of Moonsong beginning there. Many Moonsingers lead Septs and are willing to invite even representatives of Septs lead by non-believers to discuss the issues between various septs. While some may not follow Moonsong, many respect those who do for their respect of not only nature but others.

Even when Septs fight amongst themselves it is usually the Moonsingers who help mediate conflicts between the fighting parties. Some do wonder if the Moonsingers know more about the temples dotting the landscape of Erce because many of the warnings and stories of caution come from the Moonsingers.

Hektram's Folly

It was not until the 4th Expansion War that the Erce got involved in the Expansion Wars. Despite not being directly involved in the fighting at first, the Erce were dragged into the fighting by the forces of Hektram. While working on the new capital for the greater empire, the zealot Hektram sent his soldiers from the newly conquered Agrineas to capture Erce to serve as a slave labor force. Not prepared for invasion from Agrineas, several Septs were captured and forced to build the Soli city.

Many Septs argued about taking the fight to Agrineas to get their people back, however, many were frightened it would bring more Soli forces into their lands. During those times, it was considered a fate worse than death to be captured and enslaved. Primarily Erce and Verdanti were captured while most Therios and Fae escaped or were killed for being too difficult to enslave.

For nearly a decade Erce were dragged away in chains to construct monuments to Celestia and the grandeur of the Empire. Conditions for those imprisoned were miserable and most were treated as property rather than people for refusing to convert to Yemanism. Their captors were so cruel, they did not even bother to remove the dead from the camps where their captives were kept. As time went on many of the captured Erce and Verdanti prayed to simply fall asleep and not wake up in the horrible reality they found themselves in each day. In a cruel twist of fate, something did answer their prayers but not in the way any of them expected.

Rumors say a spirit began appearing to Erce and Verdanti and offered to help them to escape. Many jumped at the chance, not realizing the cost. Slowly the Erce and Verdanti learned secrets of Necromancy from the spirit to seek their revenge. Once enough people had learned the dark art, overnight they raised their dead and marched against their captors. Other rumors say some of these disgraced Erce snuck out instead of raising their fellow camp members and sabotaged Hektram's sanctification ritual as an ultimate act of revenge.

However, the resultant backlash corrupted everyone within the nation of Agrineas. Many of the Erce Necromancers, Soli believers, and Agrineans were killed immediately, only to rise as undead. In the resulting chaos, the few Soli not immediately killed found themselves surrounded by undead capable of thought and planning. Meanwhile the Verdanti caught in the backlash wave, fell into a sleep and rapidly wilted. Before the eyes of their fellow captives, they mold, and mushrooms grew until the mushrooms plucked themselves free of the rot surrounding them and saw their transformation. Soon after these new mushroom people called themselves the Mycerim.

Many of the survivors fled Agrineas and attempted to return to Erce. The first septs they encountered were horrified at what had been done. Many Erce and Agrineans were cast out because they had the taint of undeath on them. The fate of the Mycerim was left to be decided by a council of Verdanti elders. After nearly three months of deliberations,

the Verdanti elders agreed to accept the newly formed Mycerim into Verdanti culture. Seeing them as a reminder all life will eventually die and rot, they saw the Mycerim as living reminders of the often-misunderstood part of the cycle.

5th Expansion War

After the stories of what had happened in Agrineas spread through Erce, many Septs agreed they would need to prepare for war since the Soli had claimed the lands up to what was recognized as the furthest Sept's territory. Before long, the Yemanist missionaries began making forays into Erce lands. Despite their efforts, the Septs remained staunch in their belief of Moonsong or maintaining their autonomy.

In a surprising move, an expedition of Altyran Dwearn traveled across the continent and presented the idea of the Free People's Alliance to the Erce. Despite the Altyrans urging, the Erce took nearly a year to agree to the alliance. It wasn't until the Soli began making more aggressive movements, that the Erce decided to join the alliance, seeing the Soli would invade before much longer. Relieved the Septs saw reason, the Altyran left behind a cache of weapons and other supplies for the Erce with promises of more to be delivered via Cormah ships.

After the announcement of the Alliance and the Soli's reaction, the Erce found themselves at war. Numerous Septs retreated deeper into the Erce lands to create a killing ground where the septs knew the terrain and could lay traps and ambushes for the Soli forces. When the Soli scouting parties began to disappear, the Soli soon sent in a large force of their Irregular Army to fight. Within one week the Soli forces found themselves not only surrounded by guerilla forces, but by beasts, many of them had never seen picking off stragglers. When the orders to fall back came from Soli command, the Irregular forces began a slow slash and burn campaign burning away large swathes of forest while transporting large quantities of wood from Erce back to the Empire. Constructs helped speed up the process as they worked tirelessly cutting and hauling logs.

Though progress was slow, it was highly effective. The Erce lost their home field advantage as the landscape was transformed mercilessly. Many of the beasts driven towards the Soli camps refused to approach due to the fires and strange smells now coming from the constructs. Forced to face the Soli directly, the Erce began fighting a losing battle. Gradually the Septs were driven back, however the farther the Soli moved into Erce lands, the more Septs joined the fighting. Many among the Soli leadership became impatient with the progress, however, several failed attempts to push deeper forced the Soli to play the long game against Erce.

Meanwhile to the east, roving bands of undead began harrying Septs focused on providing food and medicine to the battlefield. Each Sept ravaged by the undead began adding to the horde. It would seem the Erce turned away from their home after Hektram's Folly wanted revenge on their former comrades. In time, Ercen recognized their

fallen neighbors coming to devour them. Even more fearful was the advent of some of the great beasts of the forests were rising as undead creating truly terrifying monsters.

The Walking Forest

Despite taking only a small fraction of Erce, the Soli were gaining momentum as the Constrat Corp began funneling more Constructs into the Soli burn camps. Hearing the cries of the beasts and plants of their home not to mention having lost dozens of Septs, the Erce decided to do something dangerous. Among many Erce Septs, it was believed when they died, they returned to the earth and their souls became one with the massive Skywood Trees. Each Skywood could grow to hundreds of feet tall and several even housed more adventurous Septs. The Moonsingers and Sept Leaders met during a war council to decide their next move.

Every member present had seen dozens of their friends and family killed by the Soli. Many of the Erce were tired of war and wished to end the fighting quickly. Too many Septs had been lost. An idea to attempt to call upon the souls within the Skywoods to fight beside their descendants was proposed. However, many had heard the stories of what happened in Agrineas and refused the idea. As the war dragged on each time the council met, the idea began to sound more and more necessary.

With the introduction of a new type of Construct known as the Sulphur Speaker, the Soli's deforestation operation began moving more swiftly. Sulphur Speakers could cut down trees in only a few swings of their axe like arms and spit fire scorching all vegetation within several feet of them in an instant. These Constructs were next to impossible to fight in hand-to-hand combat, and arrows seemed to bounce right off the armored frame for the Sulphur Speaker. With each passing week, more Sulphur Speakers were deployed leaving large swathes of the forests little more than scorched earth.

As the Soli forces made their way close to one of the sacred temples, many of the Erce believed the Soli would feel the wrath of the temple. However, as the Soli began exploring the temple, the Erce felt the land tremble and quake. As the Soli moved beyond the temple, the Erce, both Human and other species began having disturbing dreams about a catastrophe coming if the temples were not protected. Deeply disturbed by the frequency and clarity of the dreams, the next time the council met, they agreed to attempt to wake the Skywoods.

Using a far more advanced variation of the Ritual to Wake the Green, the Erce completed the ritual and the land quaked again, however this time, it was with the righteous fury of nature. Dozens of Skywood pulled loose from the earth and began to walk towards the Soli. Each Skywood had limbs the size of normal tree trunks they swung at the Soli crushing even constructs in a single blow. Though many Sulphur Speakers were destroyed for each Skywood brought down, the collapse of a Skywood ended with both Erce and Soli being crushed beneath their massive bulk.

Both sides looked on in horror as the destruction. Blood of both sides mingled in the valleys of Erce leaving scars across the land which still have not been healed to present day.

After a week of widespread death and destruction, the surviving Skywoods took root where they stood forming a line of towering trees as if to challenge any invaders with a crushing death. The Soli retreated having many of their constructs destroyed and soldiers crushed. Within a few weeks, the orders to retreat from the lines went out and the exhausted and terrified Soli fled.

As the Soli prepared to leave, the first sightings of Sylvagore began appearing. Both sides contended with the Sylvagore while trying to recuperate after the years of battle. Many Erce were frightened of Sylvagore believing they were the force awakened by the sacking of the temple by the Soli.

Post Expansion War

For the last several years, the Erce have withdrawn as they deal with an increase in Sylvagore attacks and the spread of the Dire Beast phenomena. Their once peaceful home had become dangerous. Most Septs have become more reliant on each other to survive. Dozens of Septs have started to band together into larger Septs, but some Moonsingers warned this could anger nature bringing further disaster. With the Altyr withdrawing after their mountain was split open, many of the supplies the Erce were receiving began drying up.

With the growth of Graewynn, the Erce have begun seeking new allies closer to home willing to join them in their fight against the Soli to the north, and the rising hordes of undead to the east.

Culture

Erce culture revolves around living a minimalist life in harmony with nature. Seeing excess as waste, the Erce only take what they need, but even if the Erce have more than they need, they make efforts to preserve those supplies to ensure they have something during the colder months.

As such, most Erce see needless killing or violence as unnecessary. Even when Septs fight amongst themselves it is contained only to those who wish to fight. Even if an aggressive Sept could sack another Sept, those who throw down their weapons are granted mercy. At first, the Septs tried to do this with the Soli, until the Soli realized this and took advantage of their mercy.

Many Septs generally model themselves after flora, fauna or natural occurrences to seek harmony with the natural world. Even those who choose aggressive role models still stick to only killing when necessary. Except for outsiders, most of them only kill to hunt or protect their Sept.

With their connection to the natural world, the Erce have learned a great deal of herbal medicines and bushcraft

allowing them to survive easily even though they rely primarily on hunting and gathering. Some Septs, particularly those closest to the borders of Erce practice farming, but even so only grow as much as is necessary for themselves or their neighbors. Dwearn advisors have often tried to push these agrarian Septs to increase their farmland but have met with staunch refusal because it is not necessary.

Erce do not put much stock in calendars and time, many feel no need to rush to do anything believing all things will be done when they are needed. Patience is often looked at as a virtue even by those who do not practice the Moonsong faith. The best most can expect from Erce when it comes to appointments is dealt with in days rather than hours or minutes. This is not to say Erce are lazy, they simply value their own time for being with family and doing the things they enjoy. Since they are rarely in a rush, they feel they have plenty of time to be among their favorite people.

Family is extremely important to the Erce, including extended family. Many Septs host several generations of families within the same Sept. Many Septs value their elders and work as a community to ensure even their oldest members receive the care they need. Some Erce elders however have taken to refusing medicine or treatment and allowing nature to run its course to not put a drain on their kin. Some see this as a selfish choice, but rarely will an Erce refuse the wishes of an elder.

Erce have mixed opinions on finished goods from other nations. Some have embraced them and have no issue using metal tools to help especially after the 5th Expansion War. Some traditionalist Septs see using metal or even processed cloth as an affront to nature.

Music

Ranging from gentle songs of nature and the forest to exciting folk music, the Erce have a diverse culture when it comes to music and song. Many Erce use music to teach and express themselves in ways. Music and singing hold a special place in the hearts of many Erce as many times they will break into song during their workday or spontaneous groups of drumming circles, stringed instruments similar to lyres and guitars commonly appear when the Erce feel the urge to fill the air with music. While not all musicians among the Erce are necessarily good, many seem to have a song in their hearts at any given time, unless they are grieving or full of anger. Singing is commonly seen to nurture life of all kinds from flora, fauna, and other people.

Artwork

Most artwork done by the Erce is done on sentimental items, clothing, and their homes. It is rare an Erce would simply leave a work of art behind. Many believe it is better to carry their artwork with them to express who they are. All artwork is made using natural pigments from nature painted onto hides, bone, wood, and cloth. Foreigners often confuse the temples as works done by the Erce, however whether part of their taboos surrounding the temples, or

simply out of respect for the natural world, most Erce would never leave behind permanent markings on the land.

Clothing

Much of Ercen fashion focuses on using natural fibers, parts of plants, and animal hides from hunts to cloth their people. Wool and cotton clothes are rarely seen among the Erce, as many feel these are excessive when other naturally collected are kinder to the world.

Many Erce take to using carved wood, bone, and stone as jewelry and decorations around their homes. Some crafters have gotten creative making decorations with natural materials. Many consider some of Erce carving to be an artform. Many bows, tools, and even armor are extensively decorated. Some are passed down through the generations. Each new generation is expected to add something to the object.

A common gift among many is the *Nomserishae*. Using pigments, charcoal, or even blood, Erce will decorate a set of leather clothing for a child when they are considered an adult. Even if the item is passed down, the parents and friends of the person will add something to the clothing. These images and decorations are often imbued with prayers and words of health and longevity.

Many Erce wear their gifted *Nomserishae* as often as they can to show their appreciation for the gift and to accept the well wishes meant behind the gift. Even if the *Nomserishae* is damaged or becomes worn, many Erce will go to great lengths to repair it using durable and long-lasting materials or replace lost pieces to the best of their ability.

Language

Erce have an ear for languages. Many Septs use a sort of amalgamation of several languages. This language is called the Sibling Tongue. Much of the language uses borrowed words from other languages to express the message the Erce are trying to convey. However, Tradespeak has had a large influence on the Sibling Tongue since so many different people use the language. Erce also pick up accents quickly and are known to speak languages like a native within a few weeks of being around native speakers.

Governing Body

The Erce do not have a hierarchy like other nations. Instead, many times Sept Leaders and Moonsingers will gather to discuss matters for their individual Sept's needs. Many alliances, trade deals, and decisions are made on an individual basis, but some Septs have long histories of working together to assist each other. In matters affecting multiple Septs at the same time, the process to make decisions is decided by a democratic decision.

Each Sept chooses their leader in their own way. Some simply choose at random using colored stones, others hold elections, others choose by seeing who is most skilled at a certain task and some have other more eclectic methods of choosing a leader.

Once every 6 years, all Sept Leaders gather for an event called the *Mezzishoa*. This month-long gathering is a time for Septs to meet distant Septs and trade stories, news, and deal with major issues threatening all of Erce. In times of great need, a *Mezzishoa* can be called early. A *Mezzishoa* was called to decide what to do about their people being kidnapped by Hektram. During the 5th Expansion War, a *Mezzishoa* was called nearly every six months, but was reduced to a weeklong rather than the traditional month-long engagement.

Military

Unfortunately, the Erce do not have an organized military force. However, they do excel in fighting defensive battles. Utilizing the complicated terrain of Erce, the Septs can make a force of a few dozen warriors seem like an army. Each Sept trains their warriors to be experts in surviving off the land, hit and run tactics, and striking when their opponents are at their weakest.

Utilizing camouflage and ambushes, the Erce rarely fight head on with an opponent. Whether getting close to skirmish with an opponent, launching sudden volleys of arrows, or destroying supplies, the Erce have mastered the art of guerrilla warfare. If they have the upper hand, some Sept's warriors will press their advantage of a lightning-fast strike and will fade the moment the odds shift against them. Most Erce only use the lightest of armors to help them keep their mobility as they race across their home. Using mud, natural pigments, and foliage, many Erce can disappear in woodland areas even during the day.

Most Erce prefer hand weapons, spears, bows, or thrown weapons. Some have taken to using guns, most commonly Dwearn black powder rifles or scavenged cartridge guns. Most simply use the weapon until they run out of ammunition and then abandon the weapon or use it as a club.

Another common sight among a Erce warrior is the use of magic to strike their foes swiftly or befuddle their senses. Erce war casters are known for preferring to disable their opponents first and only resort to lethal force if the enemy has the upper hand.

Erce typically only wear leather armor and use shields with wooden frameworks with boiled leather tacked onto the frame. This lighter kit allows the Erce to move quickly and blend into their environments easily.

Heraldry

Most Erce do not use traditional heraldry, but many wear a particular plant or part of an animal to represent which sept they come from. Outsiders often may mistake these markings as simple decoration rather than which Sept the Ercen comes from.

Gethral (GEH-thral)

Similar to the Erce, the Gethral are a collective of groups who work together more from a sense of preserving their way of life than any form of national pride. Centuries before,

before the wall between the Spirit world and the material world fell into place, the Gethral were slaves to demonic overlords. The demonic hordes would gleefully separate families, lovers, even friends keeping them apart as a form of keeping their slaves worried about the fate of their loved ones. In time the people who would become the Gethral revolted against their masters led by a hero, Merrax. As powerful spiritual beings were being torn from the world and sealed away the Gethral used this confusion to free themselves from their oppressors. However, the demons had drained much of the lands occupied by the Gethral of much of the life and vigor, leaving it a desolate place where it was difficult to survive.

Born of Chains

When the demonic forces from Abriketh arrived on the shores of Anthuli, they rapidly conquered several Human Nations along the eastern coast of Anthuli. Forced to work as slaves, the proto-Gethral were treated and herded like cattle by the demonic overlords. To break the spirits of their slaves, the overlords would separate families, lovers, even friends any chance they got.

For generations the proto-Gethral were worked around the clock building cities, weapons, and mining for all sorts of materials. When not working, the Gethral were used for sport forced to either fight in gladiatorial events, perform until their feet and hands bled, or simply hunted through the streets of the cities they had built. Hope was all but lost for the proto-Gethral for generations. Most Gethral born into chains knew no other life yet dreamed of even simple freedom as if it were a utopian dream.

Many of the proto-Gethral learned to find comfort in those with them at the time knowing it was likely to be fleeting. What love they could find, they embraced even if it was between several partners.

The City of Eternal Despair, Makehm

Built on the blood and suffering of the proto-Gethral, the city of Makehm was a place of utter misery and fear. Within the Bloodflame Citadel, the city was ruled by whichever powerful demon had taken control at the time. Within the throne room there, a forty-foot crimson flame was ignited using the souls of countless human sacrifices. This eternally burning flame served as a symbol of power among the demons. It is said the demon in control of the flame was nearly a deific being.

Fed by the suffering of the slave labor force held beneath the city, the demons residing there were always well fed and gloated over their wretched captives. Everything about the city was designed to cause fear and pain in mortals. From complicated construction of bizarre structures, roads which drank blood spilled, and the ear-piercing shrieks of the wind as it blew through structures designed to make dissonant noises.

Makehm was built into the largest mountainside on the east coast of Anthuli. Spiritual beings could access the city easily enough however, mortal forces would struggle to find

ways into the city without risking being bombarded from above by demonic magics, burning oil, or boulders.

Rise of the Wrathful

After centuries of abuse by the overlords, the hero of the Gethral was born and sold to be a gladiator. The gladiatorial pits were a favored source of amusement for the demons' watching humans murder each other for sport. Merrax was a gladiator groomed from birth to become the champion of the arena. Merrax was forced to fight daily rarely given time to recover from his wounds or rest. However, unlike most of the proto-Gethral, Merrax had a wrathful fire burning within his soul unlike any other. Seen as a berserk force of nature in the arena, spectacles were arranged increasing the challenge with each new event.

In time, a mysterious figure appeared to Merrax and spoke prophecy. The stories say the figure was a powerful Fae seeking to raise Merrax to his full potential. In the prophecy, Merrax was heralded to become the bane of all demons across the world. With an empowered sense of purpose, Merrax escaped during one of his gladiatorial matches after slaying 17 of the best gladiators in succession.

From there, Merrax proceeded to wage a one-man war against the demons. In time his example spread Merrax's passion across slave pens until the proto-Gethral had a symbol of hope they could believe in. With each successful liberation, Merrax's forces grew. Though they knew they could not permanently kill the demons, they did learn to bind them. It is said the figure who spoke the prophecy of Merrax appeared again and guided Merrax to a legendary pair of axes he could use to defeat his enemies and gather the power of his slain enemies. However, it required his followers to be without his example for some time.

Assured they would not lose faith, Merrax embarked on his quest. Details of what this quest entailed are scarce, but after months, Merrax reappeared bearing a pair of axes capable of permanently killing demons. Embracing the fury within his soul, Merrax began the Warpath. For several weeks, Merrax moved as an unstoppable force slaying every demon which crossed his path like a blood-soaked reaper. With each kill, Merrax grew more powerful. At the apex of his warpath, legends say Merrax's fury was so great he cut a path through a mesa directly towards Makehm circumventing many of the city's defenses.

As his collective forces poured through the cleft mesa now called Merrax's Fury, the proto-Gethral brought war to Makehm. Sacking the city, the proto-Gethral met with fierce resistance, however, at the same time the backlash of the sabotaged ritual in Abriketh to give the demons godlike power began drawing demons into the spirit world. The momentum of battle shifted and the Gethral took the city. Merrax raced ahead of his forces and burst into the throne room. During a battle which ruined the Citadel of the Bloodflame, Merrax defeated the Overlord controlling Makehm. There was a blinding crimson flash causing the Citadel and city to shake causing widespread destruction. However, when the proto-Gethral followers found the

Throne Room empty with no sign of Merrax or the overlord. It was believed that having gained control of the Bloodflame, Merrax had ascended to godhood.

Claiming the Narseth Waste

Determined to hold onto the freedom they had taken, the Proto-Gethral worked hard to make their way in their unforgiving homeland. The surviving humans declare themselves the Gethral, a bastardization of the demonic language meaning "No slaves". Each of the veterans of the battle with the demons took the lessons of Merrax to heart and built their new society. However, whether it was the effect of the Bloodflame or the presence of demons, the Narseth Waste had been reduced to an arid and unforgiving wasteland.

The Wastes run nearly the entire length of the eastern coast of Anthuli. In the southern portions the weather hot and dry, nearly desert like conditions. The farther north traveled, the weather becomes less arid, but the land gives only meager crops. In the northern most parts of Anthuli, the Gethral lands give way to frigid tundra.

Forced to raid when times grew hard, the Gethral were looked on by the rest of Anthuli as barbarians and monsters. However, despite the fierce raids, the Gethral did not push too far or too hard against their neighboring nations.

Despite what it had once been, the Gethral used Makehm as their capital city. Much of the city was transformed into a more habitable place. Demonic statues were filed down into beasts of the wild, the roads broken up and cast into the worst parts of the wasteland. The only thing left untouched was the Bloodflame.

Freedom of the Rohari

This desire for freedom in all things, the Gethral have taken to a faith known of Rohari. To a Rohari, the world is something to experience and explore. Some view the Rohari as hedonists and drunkards due to their practices. To the Rohari, food, drink, music, sex and even art are all precious things and should be expressed and indulged in whenever possible. Due to the harshness of their home, the Rohari treasure every moment they can enjoy a celebration or indulge in pleasure. Rohari gatherings are often referred to as Revels where Gethral gather to celebrate living through another month. For many Gethral, this is their reward after working tirelessly throughout the day and have release once a month. Few outsiders realize however, the Rohari are also dedicated to preventing slavery of any kind and fighting back against demonic forces at all costs. After the events of the Daemontide, many Rohari have become especially vigilant of signs of demonic corruption in their own people.

Several groups of Gethral began rediscovering some shamanic practices of the nations that once lived in the Narseth Waste, before it was corrupted beyond recognition. These spirit speakers began making contact across the veil

and dealt with spirits to learn and grow. Many of them viewed these beings as allies against demons.

3rd Expansion War

As war broke out with the Court of Stags, many nations sought options to fight against the Soli. Several nations approached the warlike Gethral during the 3rd Expansion War and offered them the Right of Plunder if the Gethral would fight against the Soli. Many accepted and were given the right to plunder as they wished from any battlefield or Soli controlled lands. Only a few bands of Gethral accepted at first, however, as others saw the plunder brought back, more Gethral joined in the fighting.

Anywhere the Gethral engaged the Soli during this Expansion War, they were incredibly effective. The Soli had never encountered warriors who fought like the Gethral do. Stories among the Soli soldiers flourished of demons in the skins of men murdering everything in their path. This quickly grew into a legend of the prowess of the Gethral. Traveling farther inland, the Gethral began to see how ripe the nations were for raiding.

Many among the Gethral grew quite wealthy to the point many Gethral found themselves able to trade with their neighbors rather than raid. For the first time the Gethral were seen as having some semblance of civility. Though some poorer gatherings of Gethral continued to raid, many were seen merely as bandits.

When the war ended, many Gethral returned the Narseth Waste to enjoy the spoils of their battles. For a time, the Gethral reveled and enjoyed their newfound wealth. Before long, supplies were delivered through new trade routes and the Gethral did not have to live day to day wondering where their next meal was coming from.

4th Expansion War

By the time the 4th Expansion War broke out, many Gethral had squandered their plunder, though some had made some wise investments and gained a great deal of influence over the many families across the Narseth. Hungry to plunder, the Gethral were ready to mobilize eager to gain wealth again.

This time however the Soli's new methods of war had evolved to at least present a challenge to the Gethral. However, this only spurred the Gethral to fight harder. Thrilled to have a challenge, the Gethral redoubled their efforts. More and more families and warbands appeared each day.

However, several young Gethral or those not skilled enough to meet the new challenges fled the field of battle. Instead of rejoining the fight many of these craven bands turned on the nations which had offered the Right of Plunder. This in turn did a great deal of damage to the Gethral's reputation of being honorable. To those cowardly Gethral in the field it was a chance for easy coin, however, back home many families which had thrived from the 3rd Expansion War saw their trade partners break their contracts.

As the less capable Gethral returned with spoils and stories of their victories, they met with other Gethral who had lost their trade opportunities. This quickly devolved into infighting. A general sentiment of distrust built up for those who returned from the Expansion War. As the infighting increased, many Gethral left the battlefield and returned home to handle the situation brewing there. Some tacticians believe if the Gethral had not left the field, the 4th Expansion War may have ended with the Soli taking less territory.

As the war ended, the Gethral were busy sorting their own issues and trying to keep clans from going to war with each other. This left many groups with grudges against each other creating tension in the Wastes unlike any before. The unity the Gethral once had with one another was broken leaving them unable to influence the end of the war.

5th Expansion War

By the time the 5th Expansion War began, the Gethral had mostly stabilized their grudges, many finished with duels to the death between the most outspoken of the grudges. A new Warlord, Kargath Drimstov, was chosen after undergoing the Trial of Blades. Once again united under a common cause and having eagerly agreed to join the Altyr against the Soli, the Gethral struggled to hold themselves back knowing war was coming. Though reports are mixed it is believed that small forces engaged each other on the borders long enough that the Gethral launched a massive assault a mere day after the Free People's Alliance declare war.

Across the eastern border of the Soli territory, Gethral warbands struck like a tidal wave. Many Soli outposts were razed to the ground overnight. Even Constat Corp Hands were broken beneath the hammer blow of the assault. However, the Soli spurred on by the clergy among their ranks fought back. As resistance increased, the Gethral reveled in the widespread conflict. While brave, many Gethral warbands fought recklessly and were worn down over time until the fighting shifted and the Gethral were slowly forced back. However, the Soli lines did not hold evenly and some pockets of Gethral forces were left behind most of the Soli lines creating chaos.

Though slow to respond, due to sabotage and misdirection of supply lines, the Soli began sending more Holy Orders and Constat Corp to the Gethral front shifting the battle in their favor. The newer war constructs proved their mettle against the Gethral, but not without suffering losses. As the reckless maneuvers of the Gethral were beginning to show a slowing of momentum, soon some forces were routed entirely. As casualties piled up, many Gethral families who had stayed behind began to worry about Soli invasion.

A few forces of Soli Irregulars did manage to make it beyond the Gethral borders, however, they were ill prepared for the harsh landscape of the Narseth Wastes which proved a major advantage for the Gethral.

As the pressure of the war escalated, and rumors of the Soli using terrifying new weapons able to crack mountains and wipe out hordes of undead spread, many Gethral began to worry about when they would be struck next.

The Daemontide

Though no Gethral family claims they participated in the Daemontide, it is suspected a corrupted family may have made deals with demonic forces to shift the tide of the war. In a small nameless village nearly a hundred miles from the Gethral border, a force descended on the town and began enacted horrifying rites to summon demonic forces. Once the village was scoured of villagers, the horde then moved on to the next villages and proceeded to repeat the process. As the horde grew, it began to target larger settlements meeting little resistance due to the Soli's primary fighting forces being on the front line.

As what became known as the Daemontide built, it left a taint of corruption on the land in its wake. Within a month it had already grown to a sizeable army but continued to consume like a flame burning down its wick. Soon not even defended towns were safe from the demonic jaws of the Daemontide. Sweeping aside any who tried to stand before them, only to steal the bodies and souls of their victims to bolster their ranks, the demons power grew exponentially.

After three months, the Daemontide arrived at the Mythos Gate and the fiercest battle of the 5th Expansion War began. Though the Daemontide was eventually thwarted by a charge of the Holy Order of the Breaking Dawn, many demons escaped into the surrounding countryside to terrorize at their leisure. Once the battle ended, the Soli command was quick to order all of their forces to return and abandon much of the continent.

The Gethral felt cheated from a greater prize, however, many of their forces had suffered high casualties due to the Holy Orders and Constructs thrown at them. On their way back to the Wastes, many Gethral warbands raided along the way furthering the common folk's fear of the Gethral being demon worshippers and monsters.

Post 5th Expansion War

Having returned home, many Gethral realized the true scope of how many had died during the war. Many raised grieving horns of ale to the fallen, and looked towards rebuilding not only their homes, but also their families. In the last several years many families of Gethral have joined together to form much larger families as the next generation of warriors are being trained and prepared for what the next war may bring.

Warlord Kargath Drimstov however has sealed his leadership over the Gethral because while many lives were lost, the Gethral had more coin and plunder than ever before. His plan to launch the assault had been wildly successful and many were grateful for his guidance. Though in the last few years rumors circulate the Warlord has become disenchanted with his position and yearns to take to the field once again. Though Kargath is getting

older, he still trains daily, ensuring both he and his personal retinue are prepared to go to battle at a moment's notice.

Along with his desire to fight, relations with the rest of the Free People's Alliance have turned rocky. Kargath feels the others were too busy defending themselves to truly participate in the war and if it had not been for the Gethral pushing the Soli as hard as they did, all but the Wastes would have been controlled by the Soli. Kargath has ensured that dignitaries from Erce and Altyr are aware of this opinion. While it may be arrogant, few can entirely disagree.

Culture

To a Gethral being free to follow their heart is the single most important thing to them. Despite being considered brutes, many Gethral are passionate about their chosen families and extended relationships. Gethral proudly embrace non-traditional relationships due to the treatment they experienced in the cages under the demons. To the Gethral, people should embrace what sets their hearts ablaze and love freely. To this end, many communities raise children communally teaching them in a variety of ways and even interceding on behalf of the children.

Within the Gethral community, they have embraced different styles of ethical non-monogamous relationships as the norm. While some Gethral do practice monogamy, they are the exception and not the rule. This has created many networks of interconnected people who often work, fight, and stay together. To this end, many Gethral have little difficulty having what others find to be difficult conversations between partners. Other cultures find this to be forward and claim the Gethral have no shame. While that is true for quite a few Gethral, most Gethral are simply taught to be upfront and clear about their feelings and are rarely shamed for their feelings.

To this end people may express themselves as any gender or sexual orientation and be accepted among the Gethral. Due to their wasteland home, however, Gethral who cannot pull their own weight are often sent away from the wastes and no longer recognized as Gethral. With resources in short supply, everyone in a Gethral group must be able to work and help in their own way. Many Gethral families will do their best to find something, at times anything for folks to do to not be sent away.

This forwardness does at times cause conflict between people, but the Gethral become endlessly frustrated by people who do not acknowledge their feelings. This has been a point of contention between the Gethral and most other peoples on Anthuli. Ironically the Gethral get along best with Therios, Verdanti, and Effigies who often also speak their minds openly.

Along with open feelings, the Gethral prize following their passions. Many find they come to love fighting, dancing, or following their hobbies. Learning to fight is one of the first things many Gethral learn to do. Even those who are not the most capable of fighters, find it is good to learn how to

defend themselves in desperate situations. Gethral who excel find they have plenty of chances to prove themselves between fighting the Soli even before the 5th Expansion War, including their Constructs, hunting beasts in the north, and dealing with spirits which appear across their territory. Since the Gethral deal with strange things often, many pride themselves on being able to take down dangerous enemies. It is not uncommon for accomplished warriors to take trophies from their proudest kills. Warriors are celebrated most, but those who show a true passion for their craft are equally well praised.

Within Gethral culture, they have a mixed relationship with Blood Magic. Since demonic creatures often use Blood Magic, most Gethral find Blood Magic despicable. However, a small portion of the Gethral population believe the only way to fight against the demons is to use their own weapons against them. Whether or not this is true, Gethral who practice Blood Magic tend to keep it secret to not bring down more trouble than necessary.

Since they come from very little, many Gethral are used to working with what they have on hand but are more than happy to make use of supplies they get when raiding or making deals with neighboring areas. For the most part the mid to southern Gethral do well enough with trading and mercenary work to have mostly given up their raiding ways. However, in the northern most reaches of the Narseth Wastes, the families of Gethral there still raid neighboring areas regularly. As you get into the colder parts of the Wastes, it is even harder to grow anything, and hunting is scarce.

Music

Gethral prefer exciting music telling of accomplishments, history and anything which sets their souls alight. It is not uncommon for the Gethral to have bawdy tunes or war chants to psyche up their warriors before they go into battle. Music and songs which inspire various emotions are common favorites among the Gethral who have come to appreciate many different forms of music, valuing each as a way to really let their emotions ride close to the surface.

A somewhat notable type of music the Gethral use is the Heskosa. Heskosa are mournful songs often telling of the tales from when the demons had enslaved their ancestors. Many times, these sorrowful songs are used when a group of Gethral has suffered tragedy. Few outside their culture understand why the Gethral would treasure such tragic songs, however, to the Gethral these songs remind them to feel everything, not just their joy and excitement. Some more modern Heskosa are songs about the hardships of living in the Narseth, others mourning over the loss of loved ones, and at times even about the Expansion Wars.

Artwork

Much like the Gethral's taste in music, they have a particular fondness for things which inspire feelings in their people. Some of the mesas in their homeland bear large paintings done by dedicated creators over years meant to instill something beautiful in their otherwise bleak home.

Statues have become another source of much inspiration. During the 4th and 5th Expansion Wars, their work beside the Dwearn did bring new stone working techniques to their country and between the wars, many stone cutters create art from the sandy stone of their home. Whether the work is focused on realism or the abstract, as long as it strikes a chord among the Gethral, they have come to appreciate it. Foreigners sometimes question the Gethral's tastes, but few would do so in earshot.

Clothing

Gethral are prone to wearing whatever grabs their fancy. This leads to some wild and bizarre fashion among the Gethral. Nearly all clothing worn by the Gethral are custom creations either by the wearer or weavers within the family. Decorations of bone, leather, or other trophy bits is quite common, however other Gethral do enjoy bright colors and dizzying patterns in their clothing.

Many would say the Gethral are not a bashful people. Rarely do the Gethral have any inhibitions about simply removing clothing and going about their business wearing little or even nothing. Bodily shame is not something the Gethral particularly care about, they are more interested in what folks can do even if they do not have defined muscles or perfect figures.

Gethral have also taken to inking their skin using the Ugash Thorn. One of the few plants to thrive in the Waste, this thorny plant secretes a fluid which stains skin quite easily and if it lightly pierces the flesh, it can leave long lasting markings. Everything from simple designs to elaborate art are fair game for Gethral inkwork.

Language

The Gethral initially spoke a bastardized version of the language the demon overlords spoke. Over the generations they adopted Tradespeak as their primary language to shed one more thing the demons held over them. Many Gethral struggle with learning other languages due to lack of exposure to most other languages while growing up. A few have learned to overcome this difficulty.

Hierarchy

Most Gethral families generally make their own choices, however, in larger involvements, they may choose an Axebearer. The Axebearer is entrusted to lead the Gethral group until the objective they were chosen for is completed. The name Axebearer is a reference to Merrax and his twin axes which freed their people. Once the task is completed, the Axebearer is expected to cede their authority. The few who have tried to retain this authority longer than necessary generally found they had to contend with many angry Gethral or were simply abandoned.

At times when several Axebearers have a similar goal they may combine their efforts and choose a Warlord. Warlords function like a general or a coordinating leader. Each Axebearer is then assigned a mission and allowed to carry

it out as they see fit. Warlords rarely hold their position long, suffering the same fate as Axebearers.

The only other major position allowed to rule is the Crimson Warlord. Warlords undergo the Trial of Blades in the city of Makehm. The Trial requires either the current Warlord or a successor to compete in the last remaining edifice of the demon's touch on the city. Once the Trial is entered, only one of those who goes in will emerge. Going through a series of traps, tests of endurance, and finally meeting in an arena, the Warlords to be must fight to the death to take the title of Crimson Warlord. After the Warlord emerges from the Trial, they must lay claim to the Bloodflame. Within moments the Warlord's wounds heal and they are suffused with power.

The Warlord does not govern the nation; however, they can call upon families to assist with any number of struggles. Most families will answer the call of the Warlord out of respect for what the position means as a symbol of Merrax's final battle.

Military

When it comes to combat, most Gethral are capable warriors and have more fighting experience than almost any other Human Nation. Putting this experience to good use in the Expansion Wars, the average Gethral warrior is more than a match for anyone except a professional soldier.

Gethral train in multiple forms of combat learning several types of weapons up to and including ranged weapons.

Gethral do not usually fight as a unit unless they are fighting a larger force. Most Gethral are content to get into a melee and simply let loose. If confronted by a superior foe, Gethral will fall in and stand their ground with shields and hand weapons otherwise they will scatter and engage the enemy in skirmishes until they can overwhelm the opposing force.

Magic is generally only used offensively in combat and other forms of magic are left for outside of war. Gethral also will employ Spellweavers which is unique to their style of combat. If a Spellweaver takes the field, generally a ring of shields will protect the Spellweaver allowing them to perform and disable or even harm the enemy.

Among the Gethral many use dance as their preferred form of performance, so most Gethral refer to Spellweavers as Dancers. There are collectives of Gethral who spend their days perfecting their performances.

Heraldry

Most Gethral adopt their own personal device, however, some Axebearers will adopt a device for their mission especially if several Axebearers gather to defeat a common enemy. A common saying among those who deal with the Gethral is if you see several Gethral bearing the same mark, hope they are your allies, otherwise you have trouble coming.

Cormah (KOR-mah)

Hailing from the Cormahn Archipelago, the Cormah are known throughout Anthuli as some of the most accomplished sailors, merchants, and explorers around. Many Cormah feel more at home at sea than they do on land. Captains of ships are considered their own governing force among the Cormah, however, twice a year a Cormahn Captain must return to the Archipelago and pay tribute to the Salt Mother, the ruler of the Cormah. Cormah who wish to become a Captain must seek out the Salt Mother and petition for her favor to do so. Any Captain with the Salt Mother's blessing travels knowing they can seek aid from any other Cormahn vessel or Cormah on the mainland without hesitation. Many mainlanders joke Cormah vessels are a blessing and a curse. While they are trustworthy so long as a person enters a contract with them, encountering another Cormahn vessel at sea is a coin flip on whether they will simply pass by or try to raid the ship. Much of the shipping is done by Cormah throughout the world. While officially they remained neutral during the Expansion Wars, the Cormah have traded with both sides regardless of politics or belief.

Taking to the Seas

For as long as any Cormah Clans know, they have always sailed the oceans. Legends speak of the First Captain. While the name has been lost to time, many remember the inspiring but cautionary tale. The First Captain had their ship built from the few trees growing on a tiny island in the Archipelago. Setting sail alone the First Captain did not bring nearly enough supplies and in a dehydrated and starving delirium is said to have met the Oceanima or Soul of the Ocean. The Oceanima was curious about the strange creature floating on her surface rather than swim within her embrace. While the conversation changes with each new teller of the tale, the summation of the story is the Oceanima agreed to return the First Captain home and meet his people.

When he returned, the Oceanima was fascinated by the islands and the strange people inhabiting it. Amused by their celebration in her honor, the Oceanima made a promise to the Cormah that so long as they inhabited the Archipelago, they would have the Oceanima's blessing. Since then, the Cormah have sailed across the world, but always return to the Archipelago. Much like the Archipelago they inhabited, each Captain built their ship from the few trees they could find and would rule their ship as they saw fit.

The Divided Seas

As the Cormah explored the world and made maps to understand the world around them, they discovered Anthuli and were amazed by the sheer size of the continent. Before they ever set foot on land, the Cormah circumnavigated Anthuli mapping it all the way. Many of the Captains returned to the islands and argued about what to do. Many were afraid of losing the blessing of the Oceanima. Others felt it was only right they explored the land too. They argued if some stayed behind, they should be free to explore. The

various interpretations of the Oceanima's words became more and more nuanced and argued about. Those who felt stepping foot on the mainland was putting their people's pact with the Oceanima at risk left the island first and attempted to intercept those who felt it would be fine to land. This time became known as the Divided Seas.

Though many Captains did land and explore taking advantage of untouched resources in particular lumber to build new ships, others raided ships going and returning from the mainland.

Unfortunately, it was difficult to tell which captains held what beliefs so the only recourse for the more conservative Cormah was to raid other ships searching for plunder from the mainland. This continued for decades before the Unification.

Unification of the Captains

Tired of the endless fighting and losing not only her father, her spouse, and her children to the fighting amongst her people, Hergonia Serivo gathered all of those who stayed on the island and unified them to stop the fighting. Too many had died for simple wood. She recited the words of the Oceanima and the spirit of the agreement rather than the words. A promise had been made and now both sides had proven they were correct. What mattered was the Cormah had to remain on the Archipelago. As ships returned, Hergonia Serivo's people disabled ships and withheld the comforts of home to the captains. From only feeding the crews the worst gruel, lovers withholding their embrace, and seizing the crew's cargo.

This continued until every Cormah ship was accounted for over the course of 6 years. Once the final crew had spent a month imprisoned on their own ship with only the barest food to survive, Hergonia Serivo gathered all the Captains and spoke with them. One moment she was calm and stately, the next she raged at them for their sins. As if embodying the Oceanima itself, Hergonia Serivo declared herself the Salt Mother. All captains were her children and like children would obey her. Desperate to be free of the life they had lived, they agreed. Each Captain was told they had to return to the island and pay tribute to her as reparations for their deeds. The captains to return first had sworn their eternal devotion to the Salt Mother while the more recent Captains not as broken simply paid lip service.

Each captain was forced to sign the Book of Debtors and any who did not pay their debts would be ostracized. Those who resisted were stripped of their Captaincy and sent to live on the mainland never allowed to set foot on a Cormah vessel again. Over the course of Hergonia Serivo's life, many captains who did not believe her soon found themselves alone, befallen by misfortune and unable to sell their cargo. In time the journey to the Archipelago became superstition for the Cormah rather than law. Most followed it out of fear rather than a desire to follow the Salt Mother's words.

The Salt Mother

When Hergonia Serivo passed away, the title was given to another woman, and it was decided the Salt Mother title would be passed down from woman to woman. Hergonia's closest friend and lover Mirora Uwevo became the next Salt Mother and continued the traditions of Hergonia Serivo. Future Salt Mothers were chosen from among all Cormah women known to the Salt Mother. Those who wished to become the Salt Mother had to present themselves and prove they would uphold the words of the Oceanima and ensure the Cormah prospered.

In time the mantle of Salt Mother was passed on when the current Salt Mother could no longer swim on her own. Many former Salt Mothers spent the remainder of their lives living comfortably cared for by their successor. Superstitions surround the mantle of the Salt Mother, many revolving around the displeasure of the Salt Mother invited ruin and suffering for those arrogant enough to go against the words of the Salt Mother.

Any captain who tried to seize power or disobey was also stripped of their rank and sent to the mainland to serve as a contact with the mainlanders.

The Book of Debtors

Though referred to as a single book, the Book of Debtors has become a library of chronicled tithes to the Archipelago from every Captain to ever sail. Each Captain is given a page, and they must return to the Archipelago and pay tribute. Those who go too long will have a warning sent to them. If they fail to heed the warning, ships will be dispatched to hunt down the debtor and seize their ship.

In the current day and age, most Captains will do everything in their power to avoid being labeled a debtor. The tribute is based on the experience of the Captain and size of ship they sail and how many crews they have. The larger the ship the larger the tribute. While most Captains do quite well for themselves, it is not uncommon for a Captain to turn to piracy if they have come up short for their tribute to the Salt Mother. Tribute is often not collected in coin, but instead as supplies for those still on the Archipelago.

Cormah have a reputation for being greedy, however, every Captain or merchant on the mainland must pay tribute to the Archipelago to maintain their blessing from the Salt Mother. If they do not, and their name is added to the Book of the Debtors, no Cormah ship or merchant will trade with their kin until their dues have been paid. If too high a debt is accrued, the Salt Mother places a bounty on the Captain's head and many Cormah wishing to earn favor with the Salt Mother will hunt down these bounties. The Cormah have amassed quite a bit of wealth, however, much of the money they earn must be used to purchase supplies for the Archipelago. Much of the Archipelago has become too crowded with native Cormah to sustain their people. Instead, the Cormah trade extensively with the mainland for nearly everything they need.

Ferrying the Therios

While the Cormah did not interfere in the affairs of most nations, the Cormah had developed many favorable contacts across Anthuli. This would be vital when a crew of Cormah found themselves run aground on a reef. Much like the First Captain they were on their last legs believing they would die, when a miracle occurred. The sailors thought the Oceanima had come to visit them but soon learned it was an Aquatic Therios. After finding a way to communicate with gestures, the Cormah learned of the culling happening on Kuh'nal. Making a deal with the Therios, the sailors promised to seek the Salt Mother for help saving the Therios wishing to flee Kuh'nal.

Accepting their offer, the Cormah then traveled back to the Archipelago and the Therios were welcomed as if the Oceanima had appeared once again. Over the next week, the Salt Mother listened to the Therios's situation and promised to aid them with everything she had for bringing her children back to her. Unknown to the Therios, they had rescued the eldest daughter of the Salt Mother. In thanks the Salt Mother called every available Cormah ship home and told them their next cargo. Meanwhile the Therios returned home and spread the word of the ships coming to ferry the Therios to a new home.

It took many months and dozens of trips, however, the Therios were delivered to the shores of Anthuli, and through the Cormah's connections, found jobs, lives, and homes for the Therios.

Meeting the Soli

Having spent years transporting cargo, trading between settlements, and exploring the mainland, the Cormah thought they had seen it all. However, one area had been overlooked, believed to be just a massive mountain range. One perhaps brave, or perhaps stupid Captain discovered a beach giving way to a paradisaical area within the mountains. At first the Cormah thought they had discovered a paradise hidden away from the world ripe to for the picking. However, soon they were approached by the innocent Soli.

The Captain, one Dialgo Lula, quickly surmised these people were naïve to the ways of the world. At first, he played along like he wanted to be their friend. However, when they began speaking of some God-Child, he believed they were delusional and naïve. However, soon Dialgo and his crew learned the Soli did in fact have the blessing of a goddess. The stories say Dialgo, and his crew are the only non-Soli to ever see the God-Child in all of her splendor. However, believing such a prize would pay his tribute for the rest of his and his descendants' lives, Dialgo hatched a plan to kidnap the God-Child.

The attempt failed miserably and the Soli despite being unaccustomed to violence drove him back to his ship. Gathering his crew, they pulled back from the beach and planned their next move. They left the area and returned within a season with four other ships ready to take what they wanted. During this time Celestia gave the Revelation

of Battle. When the Cormah returned, the Soli were like a different people. While they did not have a great deal of experience, the Soli fought like fanatics.

Terrified by the devotion these people showed, many of the sailors fled, leaving Dialgo surrounded by the followers of the God-Child. No one is sure of Dialgo's fate; however, few believe it was pleasant. Word spread among the Captains telling of a paradise hiding a being of great power. Falling back on their superstitions, the Cormah avoided returning to Sol directly until much later when the Cormah encountered Soli outside of Sol.

Many Cormah do not like trading with the Soli, but some do when they need work quickly. With such a large empire, the hands of experienced sailors become vital to ensuring messages are sent and supplies get where they need to go.

The Ignobli Waterways

While most Cormah prefer the high seas, many utilize the various rivers across Anthuli to transport goods even to numerous landlocked locations. The waterways they use are known as the Ignobli Waterways. Young Captains believe they are only for the newest captains and the old timers who have lost a step. However, several wise Cormah have taken to using them to access many things more arrogant Captains cannot, often bringing back goods few on the Archipelago have and earning favor with the wealthier families. Most captains with experience with the Ignobli, can trade with many different regions in a few weeks' time. While there are still large portions of the continent not accessible by the Ignobli, numerous port towns have sprung up along the waterways allowing the Cormah to expand their network of trade.

The Expansion Wars

For the most part, individual Captains were allowed to decide what jobs they took during the Expansion Wars. To some, they did not care so long as people paid. Others favored jobs for one side or the other. However, when the Court of Stags accused the Cormah of conspiring with the Soli, the Salt Mother sent a representative to the Court letting them know if they would tarnish the reputation of the Cormah, they would find the sea would not be so welcoming to them any longer. This not-so-subtle threat did force the Court to retract their statement knowing they too were reliant on the ships of Cormah to help them.

Despite the Cormah wishing to be the rulers of the Sea, the many nations of Anthuli both past and present have tried their hand at sailing. Some were more successful than others, but to the Cormah, many of them never got beyond the adolescent phase of becoming a truly seaworthy nation. It was common to hear Cormahn Captains brag they could sail circles around foreign sailors.

The truth behind this is they could as all Cormahn ships have a Sea Witch aboard. Sea Witches are those who have devoted their souls to the Sea and Sky and have learned how to harness magics ensuring the Cormah's supremacy on the sea. Other nations have tried to steal these secrets;

however, each Sea Witch knows their Captain and crew would sooner kill the Sea Witch than let them fall into the hands of another country. Many Sea Witches are treated quite well and their loyalty to the ship and crew is absolute. Whispers tell of Rituals performed by the Salt Mother herself to empower Sea Witches with their sacred charge. Academics believe this connection may have something to do with the Oceanima and a pact forged long ago.

There are epic tales of crews protecting their Sea Witch to the last sailor. Most crews view their Sea Witch as a holy individual and would be happy to give their lives to protect them.

For the most part, the Cormah have remained neutral during the Expansion Wars, though some Captains have come to blows over who they have chosen to support. The Salt Mother has always declared the Cormah will remain neutral, but individual Captains are left to their own fate should they choose to serve under one banner or another.

Even in the 5th Expansion War, the Cormah played both sides, though many Captains did take most of their work from the Free People's Alliance. During this time the Soli attempted to field a massive navy using the wood taken from the borders of Erce, however, many Soli sailors knew the theory of sailing, but had little experience. Many Cormah Captains found they could not find work as the Soli tried to become a competitor for trade on the seas. While most Cormahn Captains would avoid Soli ships, this is not to say there have never been engagements between a Captain choosing to attack a Soli ship which happened to be carrying precious cargo.

Post 5th Expansion War

Since the 5th, many Captains have been taking work both inland and along the coast of the continent. Tensions have been rising as the Soli sailors become more experienced and have even engaged veteran Cormahn pirate Captains and sent them packing. Some believe the Cormah may finally break their centuries long tradition of neutrality and rally with whoever sides against the Soli in the 6th Expansion War.

There is also a disturbing amount of Captains meeting and discussing what to do should a new war break out across Anthuli. Many are willing to even go against the Salt Mother's decree and openly side against the Soli if it comes to it.

Culture

While the Cormah do not usually convert to faiths, they tend to have a wide array of superstitions and folk tales many of their sailors believe and follow. Other human nations view this quirk with a sense of amusement, but few can question the fortune of the Cormah. Some even follow the superstitions of the Cormah in hopes of attracting good luck.

The Cormah have little care for honor, but do value their reputation as couriers, merchants, and sailors. Even those

who have turned to piracy take pride in their reputation and rarely let anyone speak ill of them. To the Cormah, reputation is more valuable than gold or jewels. This does mean the Cormah will resort to any means necessary to answer challenges to their reputation. From swift and unexpected violence to trade embargos on areas, to simply laughing off accusations, the Cormah can be as unpredictable as the sea itself.

The Cormah are not a bashful people, many will don clothing they feel will be fitting for their ports of call, but out on the open seas, many generally only wear what they are comfortable in, even if it means being bare chested while sailing. Some have accused the Cormah of trying to blend in, and as any wise merchant knows, people trust you more when you dress and act alike. Primarily, Captains and their officers only try to blend in while most other crew members continue to remain in whatever clothing they are most comfortable wearing.

Captains among the Cormah are chosen based on skill rather than lineage, gender, or wealth. Captains are expected to lead their crews to riches regardless of how those riches are obtained. Anyone who would insult a captain for not being male, had best be ready to have their mettle tested not only by the Captain, but their crew waiting in the wings should the Captain command it.

To all Cormah, the Archipelago is their home, even those who do not live there. The chain of 27 tropical islands making up the Archipelago are almost treated like holy ground where mortals are allowed to tread. Every Cormah wishes to one day earn enough wealth to purchase land on the Archipelago and live out their days among the wealthiest of the Cormah. Outsiders are welcome but find the pricing for lodging is often astronomically high compared to any other establishment due to the limited space on the islands. To an outsider the Archipelago is a chaotic mess of seaside villas, winding streets, and dark alleys. To outsiders the Cormah show a face of sophistication, wealth, and power. However, there are those who cannot afford to live in the villas or could not sail for one reason or another who live in poverty around the islands.

This has turned into a dark underbelly of the Archipelago. Even within the Villas, many have far more people in them than outsiders expect. With space at a premium on the Archipelago, even the wealthiest families must house their entire family and usually smaller families of their friends within their villas. To say the Archipelago is cramped is an understatement. During the day, the streets are packed with people both native and foreign. Cormah are generally not claustrophobic primarily due to the conditions in which many of them grow up, however, it has become a common Cormah curse "May the walls press in closer than the shoulders of the crew".

To many the Cormah may come across as greedy, however, they often must transport goods and funds back to the Archipelago to help keep the people there fed and cared for even from the mainland. Many Cormah only leave

the Archipelago or ships because there is no room for them there and want to make their own way. To some less pleasant Captains, this is a flaw in the character of a proper Cormah. Though few would say such things while not standing on their own ship unless they wished to gravely insult the Cormah they are speaking about.

Despite all of this, the Cormah are a compassionate people often moved to help others when they can, even if that help may cost the distressed individual. Some see this as a two-faced compassion and from some Captains it certainly is, but many Cormah may cut their price to help those willing to be honest with them about their situation.

Music

Cormah love bawdy tunes and songs they can laugh about to keep their morale high while plying the many seas. Because of this many Captains will take someone with a talent for music or song over another equally qualified sailor without. For many of the Cormah, these songs help pass the long voyages and keep them from being bored. Even those without much of a voice will often join in on the songs sung while at sea. Many passengers have considered it a bonus to their travel getting to hear the Cormah sing silly or raunchy songs.

More acrobatic or graceful Cormah may even tumble or dance while they perform their duties just to help keep spirits high even during rough weather or when heading into battle.

Artwork

With each Captain acting independently, most have their own takes on art. However, every Cormah appreciates a well-made ship being run properly. Shipwrights on the Archipelago and even those based on the mainland are considered celebrities because their work is regarded as an artform all on its own.

Additionally, many Cormah appreciate the jewelry, styles, and work of other cultures since they get exposure to so many through their travels. Another somewhat unique aspect of Cormah society is they love to carve trinkets from bones, scales, fins and other parts of aquatic creatures to decorate their bodies, their clothing, and their sleeping areas. These trinkets are often seen as good luck charms or ways to ward off evil spirits. No one puts much stock into the power of these trinkets, but they do make some nice coin when sold to mainlanders.

Clothing

Cormah prefer practical, lightweight clothing. Much of their style is a mishmash of other cultures they have put together to be comfortable, or respectable whichever a situation calls for.

The Captain of a ship is generally the best dressed of the crew, and more than once someone dressing in finery has found their Captain relieving them of such good clothing, unless the Captain is better dressed.

Language

Cormah are the original speakers of what has become known as Tradespeak, Since the Cormah traveled so much, their language become a good thing to learn when negotiating with them. This in turn spread across the whole of Anthuli become first a diplomatic language which many spoke, and then slowly filtered down to become the most spoken language on the continent.

Tradespeak is somewhat more complex than some other languages, due to using many borrowed words from other cultures, however, it does lend itself well to describing concepts other cultures have which do not translate well to a third party.

Hierarchy

To the Cormah, while on a Captain's ship, their word may as well have been handed down by the Gods. Only the most brazen of Cormah would go against their Captain's orders, unless those orders were dangerous to the ship and crew. While the Captain may hold great power, many of the crews of Cormah vessels still outnumber the Captain at least 10 to 1. Most Captains know better than to go against their crew otherwise they may find themselves facing down knives in the dark. Most crews if concerned by a Captain's actions will hold a vote and present the results to the Captain. Wise Captains will try to steer the decision towards their goals but keep it aligned with the crew's desires. Only a foolish or powerful Captain would dare try to run their ship like a tyrant.

All Captains are beholden to the Salt Mother who resides on the Archipelago and oversees the Book of Debtors and any relations with governments for the Cormah as a whole. The current Salt Mother is Erunumia Sestravosta. While in her late 70s, Erunumia is known for her stormy demeanor diplomatically. Ruthless, careful, and always both well informed and backed by influential people across the world, she is seen as one of the most powerful women in the world and in Cormahn history. However, those close to Erunumia know she is a fierce protector of her people and when no one is looking often makes sweet gestures to those who pay her the proper respect. While she has no power to decide who lives on the Archipelago, she does have the power to command the fleet of the Cormah should it be necessary. Many fear the day she invokes this right, because it means the fate of the Archipelago is at stake.

Military

Since the Unification of the Captains, the few who have tried to make war on the Archipelago have found it is far harder to fight the Cormah than any would believe.

At sea the Cormah prefer to ensure they have an advantage over their enemies before they strike. With the climate of a war potentially coming, many Cormah ships have taken to trading with the Altyr for their cannons, replacing the ballistae and scorpions they once used.

In combat, the Cormah hold no attack as cowardly and always fight to win. This attitude has developed into a penchant for surprise attacks rather than head on assaults. Most ships will only engage head on if they know they are assured to win. Otherwise, any trick, trap, or devious tactic is free game to a Cormahn sailor.

Aside from individual ships operating by their captain's command, the Cormah don't have a military in the traditional sense. Most Cormah have adapted their tactics to follow the idea they will not have support and must survive on their own. However, when Captains decide to team up, they can coordinate their attacks using a series of flags or lanterns. The patterns are often decided before hand so their codes can never be cracked.

If the full Cormah Fleet were to be called, it would be an impressive sight, however, many believe it would be a terrible idea because past animosity between captains could lead to dissension among the ranks and could be disastrous. Only a master of strategy could possibly herd the captains into operating as a cohesive unit.

Heraldry

Cormah Heraldry typically comes down to a Captain's preference. When a Captain takes command, they must choose their flag. This symbol is then traditionally adopted in some way by the crew. Whether as a tattoo using the Ugash Thorn, a simple badge on their clothing, or trinket on their person, crews display their Captain's symbols to show who they work with to help keep with the all-important reputation of their Captain.

Yara (YAR-rah)

Throughout Anthuli for as long as any historian is aware, the Yarans have maintained their good standing by being couriers to and from every corner of the continent. Whether transporting goods, people or simply carrying word of events, the Yarans are well respected for their gregarious and kind nature. However, the few desperate bandits which have tried to attack Yaran caravans quickly learn the error of their ways. While respect and a good reputation are helpful, being able to drive off any thieves is far more effective than hoping a thief would honor their ways. Rarely will the Yara seek violence, many Yarans are known for having the patience of saints willing to work with people rather than start a fight. If the Yara are pushed to fighting, they will not hesitate to fight back.

Nomadic by choice, the Yara are welcome nearly everywhere they roam. Known for bringing news, trade, and entertainment wherever they go, many see the arrival of the Yarans as a sign of good fortune. The Yara travel in wagon trains across Anthuli. Yarans have a strong sense of honor among their people and honor their word whenever it is given, however, this does make the Yarans careful about who they make promises or oaths. To a Yaran, breaking your word is the worst possible offense. Stories tell of terrible misfortune greeting any who break their word to a Yaran, but never by the hands of the Yara.

Nomadic Origins

Stories tell the Yarans originated in an old country known as Dagan. Dagan is known for prizing horsemanship as a true measure of a person. However, a group of Dagani wished to travel across the world rather than be restrained by the borders of Dagan. These folks became the first Yaran who chose to give up their allegiances to Dagan and travel the world as peaceful wanderers. As time went on, the Yarans found they enjoyed travel so much they would build their homes into wagons so they could go place to place as their wanderlust took them. Yet there are references to the Yara in documents even before then leaving their true origins a mystery.

To keep themselves safe, many Yara made oaths to the rulers of any land they passed through swearing they would uphold their honor and word above all else in return for safe passage. They swore to deal with their own to ensure none would break the oaths given. As they traveled from place to place giving their oaths and honoring their word to the letter, the Yarans were often welcomed by eager villagers wishing to hear the tales of their travels and the far-off sights they had seen.

The few who dared threaten or attack the Yarans soon found out why many simply left them alone. Unbeknownst to many, the oaths sworn did include those who wronged them forfeited the protection of the ruler's laws. Yarans are remarkably good at remembering faces and names. Anyone who wrongs a Yaran will often find they suffer misfortune even if never directly at the hands of the Yaran themselves unless the Yaran is pressed. From their travels,

Yarans make many friends who would happily assist them in settling these issues even if it comes to bloodshed.

Peaceful Travelers

For the most part the Yarans stay out of the business of nations and keep to themselves simply fulfilling their wanderlust whenever it calls. Most times, Yaran pass through regions as they wander. Some Yaran travel randomly, simply choosing a direction and going, while others develop more of a routine and travel a circuit.

Some Yarans have even made it their business to travel to places simply to bring news of other regions. Anyone who knows the wanderers know they have no reason to lie about what they have heard or seen. This helps the wagon train keep some coin on hand to fix their Grahdin, purchase medicines, or otherwise pay tolls. At times however, Yaran may simply turn around to not pay a toll and move on as they see fit.

There are legends, the Yarans are the ones who created Wayfaring magic, yearning to move across the world unfettered, their souls opened new paths for them. This legend has circulated if historians have been tracking history, but no one knows the exact source of it. It is reinforced by the fact many Yarans practice Wayfaring magics to help them if they run into trouble and need to get places quickly.

It is said the reason Wayfaring magics often lead to the hearts of towns is because that town at some point was blessed by a Yaran and a sort of travel nexus was created there allowing a Wayfarer to always find their way home.

Yaran Wagon Trains

A group of Yarans traveling together is called a Wagon Train. Each Wagon Train typically holds several Grahdin. Grahdin are barrel shaped wagons which can sleep up to 8 people in tight confines. The upper and lower portion of the barrel shape have compartments for storing the Yaran's things. Usually, a Grahdin houses a family or several unwed young adults. Each Grahdin is pulled by two horses or oxen depending on what is available. The Yarans have carefully bred their animals for endurance and strength over speed to pull their Grahdin and other wagons.

Generally, in a Yaran Wagon Train, there is a Kitchen wagon with all the things they need to set up camp quickly and begin cooking the moment the fires are lit. Several other kinds of wagons usually accompany a Wagon Train, including supply wagons, small mobile shops they use to sell goods to folks when they stop nearby towns, and their canvas wagons. A typical Yaran camp uses just the wagons, and their beasts of burden are allowed to feed. This serves to let them set up and leave quickly when necessary. The only time Yarans set up more than this is if they are meeting other Wagon Trains or preparing to perform for a town.

Dortini

While their beasts of burden are bred for endurance and strength, many Yaran are flexible and lithe. Many Yara practice a form of gymnastics they call Dortini which many have come to marvel at and are often requested to do performances for villages and towns they travel through or nearby. Dortini encompasses a wide variety of movements including tumbling, contortion, physical feats of dexterity even the most experienced circus performers may balk at doing, and aerial silks.

The history of Dortini is believed to come from a time when Yaran Wagon trains only stopped once every two days. Yarans would be forced to leap from wagon to wagon if they needed to see another member of the wagon train or simply to amuse themselves. This practice grew into a form of game among them, each trying more intense and interesting feats. Before long others found out about this and several nobles offered to pay them to perform for their courts. Seeing this as a good way to help invoke goodwill among the people they traveled, many Yarans took to practicing and performing any chance they got, pushing the boundaries of what they could accomplish.

The life of a Dortini is usually full of excitement, however, there are quite a few Dortini who end up trying a dangerous stunt and something went wrong, to injuring themselves and ruining their career as a Dortini. Most Dortini run into this early in their career, while those who are mindful of what stunts they perform find they have long careers and amaze crowds across the continent.

Crossroads of Wagons

When two or more Yaran Wagon Trains cross paths, unless there is something pressing them to move on, most Yaran Wagons will stop where they meet and spend a few days of communal living with their extended family. Many Yarans refer to others by some sort of familial word, such as sibling, cousin, for those of similar age or aunt, uncle, or pibling for non-binary older Yarans. These affairs often involve wild celebrations.

Many Yarans often find their mates at Crossroads of Wagons after several nights of intense celebration. During these times, tales, gifts, and blessings are exchanged as one of the happier times for a Yaran. These affairs are usually reserved strictly for Yarans and those descended of Yarans. Outsiders are asked to respect their time with their extended family and wait elsewhere. Crossroads are generally a time when Wagon Trains may join or split. This allows for new blood to be brought into the fold or allow those with a different path to travel on their own.

If a portion of a Wagon Train wishes to go their own way, many times the Yaran community will come together to build or purchase a wagon to convert into a Grahdin for young people who wish to travel by their own whims. While some tears are shed during these splits, every Yaran values letting their children spread their wings and explore the world on their own as is their right by Yaran traditions.

Every 10 years, the Gathering of Wagons occurs. During the years before a Gathering, the Wagon Trains decide on a place to meet generally amicably and as many Yarans as possible gather in one place to celebrate for an entire month. During this time, unlike a Crossroads, outsiders are welcome to the festivities. In that month, Dortini compete against one another trying to out do each other and put on the single most impressive display of gymnastic performances. Many Wagon Trains meet the new members of their people, and it is a time when young people can meet many other Yarans to determine where their path will go. The highlight of the Gathering second only to the Dortini competitions, is the Taleweaving. Yarans gather and tell stories of their travels while each member weaves a single thread into a woven quilt made from the hair of the horses or oxen used to pull their wagons with a single strand of each Yaran's hair included. When the Taleweaving is completed, it symbolizes their unity as a people even though they travel apart for many years at a time. Many regard attending a Gathering as a once in lifetime experience.

Non-Yaran Unions

While it is not looked down upon per say, if a Yaran meets a non-Yaran they wish to marry, an important choice must be made. The Yaran must either choose to give up their Yaran heritage which is known as Breaking the Wheel and live as the people of their chosen spouse, or the non-Yaran must renounce their country and ways to become Yaran. Becoming a Yaran this way is referred to as Walking the Path or sometimes derogatorily as a Hitch and Ditch.

Yarans take these decisions incredibly seriously. If a Yaran chooses to give up their place among their people, the Wagon Train will take a wagon wheel, and each spoke broken is a symbolic break with their people. The center of the wheel is left behind while the wider rim is taken with them and the name of the Yaran who Broke the Wheel is carved into it and kept until the next Gathering. Those who Break the Wheel are only allowed to be acknowledged by their immediately family should they cross paths again, other Yarans will simply ignore the person as if they did not exist.

If the non-Yaran Walks the Path, then they must undergo a ritual where they must find a tree, uproot it entirely and not simply cut it down. This is to symbolize the person is freeing their roots to wander as a Yaran. From the tree the artisans among the Yaran will carve the symbol of a *Obahorse*, which is a wooden horse about 6 inches long. The non-Yaran must wear the *Obahorse* for one year and 16 days as a sign they are entering the Yaran society. If the non-Yaran can adapt and integrate themselves well, they are welcomed into Yaran society as if they had been born a Yaran. However, if the *Obahorse* is lost or they fail to adjust to Yaran society, they are banished, and the union is broken. Some Yarans have been known to Break the Wheel to be with the ones they love if the loved one could not adjust.

Pre-Expansion Wars

Though not much is known about the Yara's activities before the Expansion Wars, a willing historian could track the paths of dozens of Yaran Wagon Trains across the continent.

Yemanists have attempted to convert Yaran groups to spread the words of El'Yemana far and wide, but many Yara see this as not their business and almost no Yara will give an oath to a Soli or Yemanist because of this. Yarans look at religion as a person's personal preference, but do not participate in missionary work or attempts to convert others. To a Yaran, if faith brings comfort, they should practice it, but never force their ways on others.

For the most part, Yarans do not involve themselves in the affairs of nations and instead keep to their travels. However, the Expansion Wars saw many Soli and Yemanist groups accuse the Yarans as spies or saboteurs looking for someone to blame when things did not go their way. This has led many Yarans to avoid Soli lands unless whatever instinct or wanderlust guiding them draws them that direction.

Several times, the Yarans have had to deal with Soli who could not take no for an answer when the question of conversion comes up. There is a growing movement within the Yaran community to forbid travel into any Yemanist town or lands. However, this has often only intensified the wants of some youthful Yarans to travel there. Older Yarans caution against this as it would go against their original beliefs of being able to travel as they please.

Culture

Yarans above all else value the freedom to go their own way. This is often characterized by a wanderlust which seems to live in the souls of each Yaran. No one can explain it, but they simply feel the urge to travel and never set down roots. For Yarans who do wish to set down roots, they are certainly allowed to do so, but must never claim to be Yaran again. This tradition has held fast for hundreds if not thousands of years. Only those with the desire to travel like they do can be called Yaran. Everyone else is not Yaran. This has never been seen as an insult, simply a state of being.

Because of their worldliness, Yarans embrace the new and the different surprisingly well if these new experiences are not deadly. It is rare for a Yaran to have an unkind word to say about others, seeing each culture they visit as valuable in its own way, yet they will condemn cultures of cruelty or wickedness for their actions. So long as Yarans are left to their own devices, rarely will they do anything against the people whose land they travel through.

Yarans recognize borders show differences between nations, but few of them grasp the necessity of such things. To the average Yaran, all people are the same and treated as friends until proven otherwise.

One key fact all Yaran's agree on is they must always keep their word no matter the consequences. This has led to Yarans being careful about making promises or oaths and being very clear about the wording of such things. For a Yaran to give their word is to make an unbreakable bond. Should a Yaran break their oath, it is considered the greatest sin a Yaran can commit. A breach of their oath is to be ostracized from the Wagon Train. This does not strip their status as a Yaran like Breaking the Wheel; however, it does mean they must either travel alone, or seek forgiveness with another Wagon Train.

Recovering from being labeled an Oathbreaker is no easy task. Even if another Wagon Train was willing to take the Yaran in, they must undergo 5 years of service to the Wagon Train. This 5-year period is referred to as the "New Life", when the Oathbreaker Yaran must give up their old identity and build a new one entirely. They must give up their name, and not talk about their life before. They are treated as a child and retaught everything important to Yaran society.

Music

Yarans may have simply picked up various styles of music from their journeys or inspired other nations with the music they already had. Many songs across the continent were written by Yarans in dozens of different styles. Many consider Yaran's influence on music to be a chicken or the egg situation.

Yaran's have a deep appreciation for music of all kinds, and many have an ear for a good tune. Many Dortini tumbling acts are often set to music popular in a region to help enhance the performance.

Artwork

Despite a love of music, Yarans do not create many works of art. For them the sights of the world and exploring unknown places is its own art. Many Yarans appreciate natural beauty whether it is the way a mountain or a cloud is shaped, or even the way a tumbler's body moves during a routine. To the Yaran the simple things of every day are artwork.

Clothing

Partial to practical clothing for traveling, Yarans wear a lot of handmade utilitarian clothing suited for the life of travel they lead. The only times they wear anything extravagant is Dortini tumblers will often wear showy garb, or they will try to wear finer clothing when attending the Gathering.

Language

Immersed in many languages over their lifetimes, the Yarans are known to be multilingual when necessary. They are one of the few groups who can pick up and master Soli Dawn Sign with little difficulty. Primarily though all Yarans know Tradespeak and often can adjust their accent to match the locals, helping them mesh with the Nations they visit.

Hierarchy

Yarans do not have a hierarchy per-se, many times each wagon makes their own decisions about what is best. They follow an anarchist concept of leadership. If they must be represented, often one person is chosen from among them to represent them until a matter is concluded. No Yaran likes this duty, and many would prefer not to be chosen, however, they must fulfill their role should the need arise.

Military

Many Yarans abide by a degree of pacifism in most instances, however, should harm come to their Wagon Trains, many Yaran are not above acting if need be. Whether through guile or requesting aid from allies, many would rather leave the Yarans alone than potentially bring their allies into a battle. Wise rulers often answer the call of Yarans, knowing better than to deny a Yaran unless they are unable to assist. Yarans will not begrudge someone who is unable to assist them and often move onto the next group without fuss.

Heraldry

Yarans if they bother to wear heraldry, it often is only of their particular caravan. This can be anything from symbols to particular pieces of clothing, or even tattooing.

Agrineans (AG-re-NEE-ans)

One of the oldest nations of Anthuli, Agrineas was founded to fight back against the monstrous forces of the world. Much of Agrineas's early history was full of heroic tales of valor and strength fighting back against spirits, demons, beasts and other dangers. This legacy kept Agrineas safe as other human nations began to form. Many respected Agrineas for their martial spirit and willingness to aid others.

These traditions last for hundreds of years sparking many tales of bravery and chivalry told across Anthuli. Yet during the Vengian Wars, Agrineas's culture shifted after a series of betrayals. Many Agrineans become bitter and skeptical of outsiders. With set back after setback trying to honor their traditions, the culture of Agrineas shifted from being welcoming to become isolationist. A common Agrinean saying is "Honeyed words and hidden blades" meaning they do not trust people and should always be on guard.

For nearly one hundred years, Agrineas did not let outsiders into their lands unless it was for diplomatic purposes. The lands of Agrineas held sufficient farmland and other resources they needed for very little from outsiders. The Agrineans were so dead set on this isolation, anyone found crossing into their lands without diplomatic protection were charged with a variety of crimes generally resulting in imprisonment or execution. Several times the Agrineas threatened to go to war with other nations when villages began forming too close to their borders. Few wished to risk that conflict due to Agrineas being large and powerful.

However, a drought lasting for nearly two years forced the Agrineans to rejoin the rest of the continent. Suffering for two years and their people starving, the Agrineans Hierarchy lifted the isolationist policy. However, many were leery of dealing with Agrineas when they first tried to reestablish relations with others. Political power had shifted and many of their former treaties and alliances had decayed to words on pages from nearly a century ago. None of their former allies honored any of these treaties which only furthered the Agrineans distaste for foreigners. It took almost 20 years before any kind of good relations began to build.

The Treaty of Hesu

With many years of war and difficulty Agrinean diplomats began calling for reform. After years of difficult negotiations, the Agrineans and 18 other nations agreed to sign the Treaty of Hesu. The treaty established and regulated trade between the nations and anyone who made aggressive actions of other nations would not only be subject to the combined forces of the other nations of the Treaty, but also would suffer economic sanctions.

However, many common folks found the treaty greatly hindered trade due to high tariffs and taxes imposed by each country on goods. While war did not break out, many commoners began accusing other countries of trying to bleed them dry using the Treaty as their justification.

During this time, Agrineas felt it had overcome much of the bitterness from generations before. They had established good relations with their neighbors, however, kept strictly to the provisions of the Treaty. Yet when the time came to renew the Treaty, only Agrineas and two other nations wished to renew the treaty. Each of the nations surrounding Agrineas were attacked and taken over by rivals leaving Agrineas surrounded by hostile forces. Saved by their long years of training, the Agrineans were able to hold back the worst of the assaults, but their methods of war were beginning to show their age.

Once again, many Agrineans became bitter towards foreigners as they were locked into war for many years following the end of the Treaty of Hesu. Forced to adapt, the Agrineans adapted their combat strategies to become vicious going as far as salting their own fields to leave nothing behind for invaders.

The Dyranda Manifesto

As the years pressed on, a revolutionary named Algeron Dyranda rose and gathered many of the common folk together and demanded change. The common folk wanted to feel pride in their nation again. Most felt Agrineas had lost its way and would collapse if something was not done. A group of revolutionaries assassinated the sitting Hierarchy and the succession drove the nation to civil war. A dozen nobles split the country and warred among themselves trying to determine who would lead. Dyranda wanted to establish a more powerful central government and centralize a great deal of power rather than deal with nobles and their petty bickering. In time Dyranda's Manifesto spread and called for the execution of nobles.

Tearing down the antiquated traditions of their nation was the only way to save it. Each noble intensified their efforts to claim power. Some nobles went as far as to recruit mercenaries or make deals with neighboring countries. This only spurred the common folk to hate them more as the nobles bargained away parts of the country to claim a seat they did not deserve. This dragged on for five years before even the nobles' servants turned on them. Nobles not killed in their beds escaped to other countries to live in poverty having only their name to bargain with and finding it did not give them much.

Rebuilding took decades as Agrinean society had to rebuild from the ground up. This process was slowed by other nations trying to take advantage of the chaos within the country.

Corruption in the Senate

Even with the high ideals of Dyranda Manifesto, corruption became rampant in the senate of Agrineas. Executing the nobles left relations with other nations strained as the courts refused to deal with the common riffraff of Agrineas. However, other nobles took advantage of the state of the Agrineas and bribed senators to influence the rebuilding of the nation.

Everything in Agrineas became more difficult as senators often required bribes to take any kind of immediate action. For years this continued leaving Agrineas severely weakened and just barely able to hang onto what they had.

It was not until the first Soli missionaries appeared in SY 310 in Agrineas, bringing new ideas, and generous donations to the peasants. While Yemanism spread through Agrineas, the government did its best to prevent Yemanists from gaining any true political power. Many laws were passed preventing anyone even suspected of being a Yemanist to hold any position of power.

Most Yemanists used these laws to stir dissent among the common folk claiming the Senate was as bad or worse than the nobles they had replaced. Yet those in power kept their power because they recognized these new ideas were a danger to their control of the nation.

The 1st through 3rd Expansion Wars

Despite the urgings of Agrinean Yemanists, Agrineas remained neutral through the first three Expansion Wars. However, many of the senators grew rich transporting and providing resources to both the Soli and their opponents. This period showed a significant increase in Agrineas's wealth, power, and prestige. As nations struggled, many would turn to others to get the supplies they needed for the war effort, and Agrinean merchants used this desperation to line their pockets.

Though it grew Agrinean economy, many common folk felt their senate was not representing their interests with the laws preventing Yemanists from holding office or truly having any kind of strength. Through their connections with the Soli, many Yemanist merchants in Agrineas became fabulously wealthy and began bribing senators with fortunes to get the laws repealed allowing Yemanists to hold positions of power.

Slowly, Yemanists began gaining a hold over the government and instituted new policies which helped Agrineas continue to prosper by reorganizing their military and working toward Soli interests. Before the Fourth Expansion War, the Yemanists controlled approximately 30% of the Agrinean Senate.

4th Expansion War

Fearing the Soli's expansion and the growing presence of Yemanists in the Senate, the other Agrineas took extreme measures. Overnight faithful Senators were arrested and imprisoned. Legislature was put into place to round up Yemanists and confine them to certain villages since they were believed to be spies for the Soli. Agrineas then declared war on the Soli and their faithful. Agrineans felt like their country was being stolen by El'Yemana's followers and felt they had to take extreme measures. Many hoped to break the hold the Soli had on their way of life. Many claimed they needed to return to their roots and once again become a nation of warriors and heroes.

This rallying cry galvanized the non-Yemanists to fight. However, due to the corruption of the senate and many years of merchants trying to cut corners, the Agrinean military was under equipped to handle war on the scale set before them.

The tipping point for the Agrineans was when the Soli deployed a new type of construct against them in SY 456. These war constructs were unlike anything the Agrineans had fought before, and they did not have the means or training to fight back against the steel automations. Before long, the Soli troops freed the Yemanist Senators and freed the Yemanist Agrineans from the containment villages. In turn the Senators and other Yemanists assisted the Soli in conquering Agrineas. The Yemanist Senators believed they would be given back their positions of power for handing over the country to the Soli. Yet the Soli had other plans. Each of the Yemanist Senators were put on trial for countless charges of corruption and abuses committed against the Agrinean people.

This won over the common folk seeing their impotent Senators tried and removed from power. The Soli set about instituting the Doctrine of Dawn and reshaped Agrineas in only a few years without risk of corruption. This led to a wave of conversions and Agrineas becoming one more province of the growing Soli Empire. For a time, this was seen as a new golden age.

The Folly of Hektram

However, this golden age was short lived as a new Provincial Governor was appointed, one Monzori Hektram. Hektram was fanatical even among a faith full of fanatics. Hektram believed it was his sacred duty to construct a second capital within the lands of Agrineas, one that would rival Segog. He began construction within days of being appointed. He had demanding timelines and began working people to the bone. However, in time it was not enough. Hektram ordered his fellow fanatics to go into Erce and take captives to help with the great work.

Soon Soli soldiers entered Erce in small groups and began kidnapping anyone they could find including Ercen and Verdanti. Long trains of captives were dragged to the site and forced to work. Many of the Ercen were mistreated by the Yemanist Agrineans and Soli. Hektram kept demanding more from workers. As the slaves taken from Erce began dying from being overworked, Hektram ordered the bodies be left in the camps as a reminder of what would happen to them if they did not meet his deadlines.

However, the desperate prayers of the slaves caught the attention of a dark spirit which taught them Necromancy to bring down their oppressors. After seven long years of work, the capital which was supposed to be known as the Celestial City, was being prepared for a Grand Ritual called the Solace of El'Yemana which would sanctify the land to Yemanism making the entire province of Agrineas holy ground devoted to Yemanism.

However, the uprising of the slaves occurred while the complex preparations of the Grand Ritual were being performed. The dead rose under the command of the slaves and began fighting back against the Soli and Yemanist forces. During the uprising, the Ritual was sabotaged and instead of sanctifying the land something far darker occurred.

A wave of necrotic energy washed across Agrineas in an instant. The land twisted and rotted as most of the people within Agrineas were killed only to rise as undead. No one is quite sure why some of those who rose remained sentient, while the rest of those killed rose as mindless undead. Soli, Erce, Agrineans, and even Verdanti, none were safe from this catastrophic backlash. The Verdanti caught in the wave fell into a deathlike state and began growing mold and fungus across their bodies. Many awakened, transformed into Mycerim.

About one third of the living population of Agrineas was not killed by the wave and found themselves surrounded by the undead trying to devour them. Tens of thousands died eaten by their former friends, families, and neighbors. Rumors suggest Hektram and his inner circle were not killed and attempted to escape, yet as if marked for death undead hounded him across the lands. There are those who claim to have been there when Hektram was caught and punished.

The living Agrineans soon found that their sentient, but now dead, countrymen attempted to shield them from those mindless undead. Many took refuge in small towns farther away from the larger city centers of Agrineas. In time when the undead could no longer find easy prey, many began wandering out of Agrineas and into the surrounding countries spreading panic. Most countries decided to quarantine the border and had to set up guards along the borders of Agrineas to keep the undead threat contained.

Fearful that what had befallen Agrineas could spread, even the living were not allowed to leave their country. Agrineans were forced to learn to live and survive surrounded by mindless undead. Forced to survive in this difficult environment, Agrineans underwent a change from once proud warriors, to surviving by any means necessary. Much of the culture and tradition was lost because the libraries and cultural centers of Agrineas became overrun by undead.

The Necropoli

There were eight large city centers within the lands of Agrineas before it fell. Each has been transformed into a ruin of what it once was streets choked with mindless undead. For whatever reason, mindless undead seem drawn to these city centers leaving them impossible to navigate for the living. Agrineans have taken to referring to these places as Necropoli.

Much of the resources once controlled by Agrineas and their history is now lost in a sea of undead ready to devour the living. There are plenty of rumors which continue to

persist there are figures moving within the Necropoli with purpose.

Even the lands of Agrineas are twisted by whatever power tainted the living within Agrineas. Much of Agrineas has been transformed into saltwater swamps filled with insects, vermin, and undead. Farming within Agrineas has become difficult. Most plant life struggles to survive as if the land itself were tainted with death. Within the borders of Agrineas, if a living person dies, 9 out of every 10 rises as some form of undead. Of those that rise about one in every hundred rise sentients.

5th Expansion War

During the 5th Expansion War, a few survivors escaped the region with tales that the people of Agrineas had become cruel and bitter towards the rest of the world. In time, the undead had come to rule the area and the humans still alive within the country were forced to survive by any means necessary even if they were protected by decree of the rulers of what was once Agrineas. Agrineas has become a vicious country to live in with many of the humans born there being forced to grow around the undead. Things like medicine and agriculture are rarely used, so many Agrineans must provide it for themselves.

Despite the harsh conditions, many Agrineans take a twisted pride in being able to live in these lands, surrounded by the undead and live day to day. Others have family who have risen as undead and struggle to part with their loved ones. Few foreigners understand why anyone chooses to live in Agrineas, but only the Gethral come close to being as accomplished survivors as the Agrineans.

The years since Hektram's Folly were difficult times for both the living and the dead. Even when the survivors tried to leave, they were inevitably turned back by the Soli forces holding the border. Even Erce turned away all but the Mycerim trying to leave Agrineas believing them to have been pulled from the natural cycle and now were outcast. Everywhere the Agrineans turned, they were rejected which furthered much of the resentment and bitterness Agrineans hold against the rest of the continent.

Along the northern borders, the Soli constructed the Wall of Sacraments in record time making heavy use of constructs to work around the clock. Constructed and sanctified, the wall is the only barrier to hold back the swarms of undead pushing out from Agrineas. The Order of Fronii were assigned as a special unit to guard the Wall of Sacraments from the undead. In their zeal, they believed anything coming out of Agrineas was dangerous even if it was alive.

In the final months of the 5th Expansion War, the Soli chose to test a new weapon only known as the Exorcist on a massive swarm of undead which had gathered and threatened the Wall of Sacraments. When it was used, thousands of undead were reduced to dust in a moment to the horror of Agrineans. Those who witnessed the weapon said there was a flash of light and undead simply crumbled to dust, the only sound was the sudden absence of

groaning and feet shuffling where the ever-present noise of the horde had been. Even the land was reduced to bare soil, devoid of any living material, not even fungus or vermin did not dare appear within the region. Few cheers went up from the Soli lines, however, even they seemed frightened of what the Exorcist could do.

Post Expansion War

Since the Soli's exodus from Graewynn, Agrineas has attempted to reach out, however, the Order of Fronii has worked to keep the undead from spreading into Graewynn but they have far less soldiers and supplies, now forced to work with what they have on hand.

Many Agrineans have built up the villages they had taken over to be bastions to protect against the mindless creatures roaming their home. Agrineans have instituted strict laws to protect against undead rising within a settlement. To this end, many Agrineans have developed a desire to watch their neighbors knowing if any of them die it could turn into a cascading issue as more undead rise when one goes on a feeding frenzy. Even the Mortaeans Agrineans watch their living neighbors knowing the mindless ones will not differentiate.

Most Agrineans are so focused on surviving, they have been willing to brave the Wall of Sacraments to find allies beyond their borders. Every few weeks, more living Agrineans try to slip into other countries seeking aid and allies. Since the Fronii were forced to abandon the eastern parts of the Wall of Sacraments, Agrineans have been able to slip through more often, the main issue becomes dealing with the mindless undead as much as the Fronii patrols sent along the abandoned portions of the wall from time to time.

Despite their mistreatment since the Folly, many Agrineans simply want to live peacefully and find a way to fix their twisted home. Most of them realize it will be difficult without outside assistance. Some stubbornly want to try and fix it on their own. There are those who have embraced what Agrineas has become and simply wish to share their misfortune with all other nations.

Culture

Modern Agrineans have a bleak outlook for the most part due to the lands where they live. For them, simply getting through the day is enough for many of them. Many want more but struggle to find ways to do any more. This has forced Agrineans to take what they can in the moment. Even if it means harming others to get what they need. Many wish to escape the dark wasteland they call home and live beyond the borders of Agrineas.

Most Agrineans put priority on useful things rather than beauty or even art. Within Agrineans every day the people must give a little more of themselves to ensure they survive. Many Agrineans are tired of simply surviving and long for more. Many have tried to cling to the stories of ancient Agrineas and revive their warrior culture in hopes of finding a way to restore their homeland. To this end, many

Agrineans have become self-sufficient and choose to not rely on others. Most Agrineans have become fiercely independent believing they have to look out for themselves.

However, when times become difficult, the Agrineans will band together throwing aside the façade of independence to work with others if it means they can claw their way to one more sunrise.

Most Agrineans are distrustful or suspicious of people offering help after years of being refused or betrayed by foreigners. Many Agrineans have become well known for enjoying good food and drink or being amazed by things others take for granted. Most Agrineans born within the last fifty years have grown up with little and when they do escape their homeland see things others take for granted which the Agrinean had to fight for. This has created a deep appreciation for simple things like a safe place to sleep, not having to ration their food, or even medicines to handle things their countrymen had died of which are considered a nuisance in Graewynn.

By necessity Agrineans are slow to trust people, however, many Agrineans also would not hesitate to leave someone behind if it meant they will survive. Gaining the trust of an Agrinean is nearly a legendary feat. Agrineans often do not understand romantic interactions because they seem superfluous to a survival minded people. Most Agrinean rendezvous seem loveless or even cold. Many Agrineans focused on survival do not feel there is time for romance or pleasure.

Music

Agrineans do not have much in the way of music normally, music often risks drawing undead to them. Once outside their homeland, many Agrineans initially are frightened when music is played thinking it's going to bring down gnashing teeth and death. However, once Agrineans realize music will not get them killed, many become fascinated by music and song. It is not uncommon for Agrineans to want to hear music as often as possible so they can catch up for lost time.

Art

Agrineans have adapted artwork into working with what they have. Bone and leather are common mediums for artwork. Many Agrineans have become excellent leatherworkers, but other nations do become concerned because to Agrineans hide is hide, even if it may have been a person's skin before they turn it into leather. When given the chance, they may make some interesting use of various materials others may not have considered when making equipment. This also translates to their artwork.

Some artwork done by the Agrineans uses other unique materials including body parts, animal bones, and even toxic elements for strange or interesting colors.

Clothing

Agrineans are fond of functional clothing beyond anything else. Most Agrineans do not understand the need for fancy clothing, and often incorporate armored bits into their clothes if it will not interfere with their movements. Most Agrineans find flashy clothes a waste of time and materials which could be better spent on other things.

A common clothing item is a high stiff collar. Many Agrineans wear this for a specific purpose rather than as a fashion statement. Knowing their neck is often a spot bitten by the undead or good for feeding by Mortaeans, wearing a high stiff collar is the Agrinean way of saying they do not wish to be eaten or deal with enough dead things to know better than leave their neck exposed.

Language

Agrineans once spoke Agrin, it was a language steeped in lofty imagery and was used for telling great epics. Agrin is now mostly lost as a spoken language. Unlike other languages context is highly important in how Agrin reads. Many scholars have struggled to translate Agrin scrolls. One scholar may translate a scroll and come up with what sounds like a weather report, while another may translate it and get an epic tale of a sorcerer slinging lightning.

Hierarchy

Agrineans have tried a variety of governments, and few seemed to agree with them. Most Agrinean settlements now operate on a mostly anarchist style. Generally, the Agrineans work together out of necessity rather than loyalty. Beyond Agrineans many of their people find it difficult to accept leaders who claim authority based on ancestry and not merit. Most Agrineans have trouble respecting nobility unless they have proven themselves in battle or show they make wise choices over simply being expecting people to follow them because of the circumstance of their birth.

Military

Agrineans do not have a formal military, however, they do have impressive fighting forces. Agrineans have taken to leading undead to their enemies and letting the chaos resolve itself. This has proven disastrously effective; however, it has backfired more than once.

Most Agrinean villages usually have a militia consisting of human Agrineans, Mortaeans, and the occasional Mycerim. Agrineans fight dirty, few will worry about things such as honor or taking captives. What Agrinean warbands exist are brutal in the extreme leaving no survivors or the ability to rise. Agrineans often will leave mangled corpses behind to ensure if the person rises, they will be little more than a potato with gnashing teeth.

Heraldry

Agrinean heraldry once was noble designs symbolizing strength, unity, nobility, and honor. Since Hektram's Folly, what few markings the Agrineans use are often dreaded

symbols of death, pain, or vengeance. Agrineans typically will use dark colors for the background of their sigils with a stark brighter color to make it easier to see even from a distance.

Grey Watch / Graewynn **(GRAY-win)**

After the Soli retreated at the end of the 5th Expansion War, the large stretch of land they abandoned became known as Graewynn, or the Grey Watch. Many of the people of Graewynn found themselves cut off from the aid of the Soli and left to fend for themselves as all military and nobles allied with the Soli fell back. Many of the villages, towns, and cities left behind gave up Yemanism feeling highly betrayed, however, since much of their culture had been erased, many did not know what would become of them.

Today, many areas of Graewynn have been left to fend for themselves. Some regions have thrived while others have become battlegrounds of people fighting for resources or remnants of the war left behind such as mindless undead, malfunctioning constructs, errant demons, the Sylvagore, and other people. Regions of Graewynn closest to the Soli or Free People's Alliance have thrown their lot in with those countries, while others wish to remain independent and try to rebuild their own nations. Many see Graewynn as a land ripe for banditry and rulership, others worry about what will become of the continent as Graewynn encompasses roughly half the landmass of Anthuli.

Grey Watchers have become a melting pot of many different beliefs, cultures, and societies. Often Grey Watchers adopt customs of other people seeking to build their own culture. Many Grey Watchers worry about what the next era will bring, fearful their homes will become an even bloodier battleground as the Soli make their next push, or if the Free People's Alliance tries to take the fight to the Soli. There have been several movements to form new nations and faiths to rally people together to protect themselves from the forces of either the Soli or the Free People's Alliance if they come demanding fealty to either side. Many Grey Watchers do not feel they are beholden to tradition as they now must forge their own identities. Even in the areas where Yemanism is still commonly practiced, there is concern about what designs Celestia and the Soli have for them once the call to war is sounded again.

A Multitude of Traditions

Graewynn being a byproduct of so many erased cultures and the Soli's traditions has left a people with no long-standing identity of their own simply trying to make their way in the world. Most Grey Watchers are from mixed families of various Human cultures. Some yearn to rebuild their own nations and found their own cultures, while others want to go back to being ruled by a more organized nation. The average Grey Watcher has felt a significant sense of loss when the Soli retreated. Since then, stability has been scarce in Graewynn. Many have resorted to banditry or isolationism to protect themselves.

Grey Watchers often find they make the best of many traditions. It is not uncommon for Grey Watchers to combine customs and traditions of their parents or other nations often to surprising results. Many Grey Watchers find

they are willing to learn from and accept others because so much has been lost and at this point all they have are each other.

It has surprised many how welcoming Grey Watchers can be. For such a diverse group of people, many of them have learned to accept help from any source. However, many Grey Watchers are finding they feel a sense of pride in the way they have become after gaining a taste of true freedom. While the people of Graewynn are accepting in many ways, there are those who only care for themselves.

Notable Groups within Graewynn

There are a few notable groups and budding nations within Graewynn worth mentioning as they are beginning to show growth and organization.

Sai'tren, City of Lost Hope

Sai'tren is based on the eastern side of Dal Umma, the cursed mountain. Originally Sai'tren was a crossroads where many peoples gathered and traded, however, before the 5th Expansion War had ended, several groups of bandits came together to plan a heist of legendary proportions. Executing a night raid, the bandits swarmed Sai'tren when a large Soli wagon train was carrying vital supplies to the eastern front.

Hundreds of bandits descended on the city to loot and pillage. At first it seemed like they would be unopposed. However, only an hour behind the wagon train was a fresh company of Soli troops. These troops encircled the city and prepared to take it. However, the bandits had captured a Soli noble and threatened to kill them if the troops remained. This standoff lasted for weeks and if it were not for the orders to fall back, it may have lasted even longer.

During that time the bandits had gotten quite comfortable inside Sai'tren and after seeing the Soli leave, they decided to keep the town as their own. Others flocked to Sai'tren learning it was a place for bandits by bandits. With the power vacuum left after the Soli's retreat, hundreds of folks were forced to take up thieving and banditry to survive. Many fled to Sai'tren hoping to find sanctuary. What they found was a city with only one law, "Pay your debts". This law became used to justify any number of crimes within Sai'tren. A sort of hierarchy emerged as the most powerful criminals rose to the top and commanded their minions to keep others in line.

These criminal families have established territory and defend it ruthlessly. It is said within Sai'tren you can lose not only your money, your dignity, your life, but possibly even your soul. Those who cannot adapt a healthy sense of paranoia and caution find they will lose everything in Sai'tren and be forced to fall in line under some self-styled bandit boss. The one thing you cannot find in Sai'tren is hope, many there believe they ended up in Sai'tren because they had nothing else and were forced into a life of crime and violence.

Unlike other groups, Sai'tren does not claim much territory beyond the slums around the city. However, anyone trying to include Sai'tren within their borders will find they have no control over what the city can and cannot do. Many within Graewynn believe Sai'tren if pushed would crumble from within, but a few brave soldiers will tell you, pressuring Sai'tren is like trying to pet a wounded cornered animal.

The Fronii Imperial State

In the southwestern region of Graewynn, north of Erce, the former Soli controlled lands have organized themselves into an Imperial State based on the Order of Knights left behind to defend the Wall of Sacraments when the Soli fled. Many believe the Fronii are just awaiting their chance to rejoin the Soli Empire, however, the Soli have not accepted their emissaries to discuss rejoining them. Some among the Fronii believe they were left behind to perform a crucial duty to keep the undead from Agrineas from spreading too far beyond their lands. Others question if the people who have become the Fronii were forgotten. Few people were evacuated from the region unless they had direct ties to the Yemanist Clergy.

While primarily made of Grey Watcher Yemanist converts, the Fronii are still a melting pot of various groups who have remained loyal to the Soli. They accept any who still follow the ways of Yemanism except for Mortaeans and Graveborn Effigies. A fanatic hate for anything even resembling an undead creature pervades the Fronii's culture. In their minds, they are the shield protecting the rest of the continent from the undead threat, and the torch to burn away the taint of undeath.

Rhondal is the capital of the Fronii State. The city hosts tens of thousands of people within its heavily fortified walls. When the Wall of Sacraments was constructed, many within the region the Fronii occupy believed they needed to fortify their settlements in case the Wall of Sacraments was ever breached. Each Fronii settlement is organized, defended with heavy stone walls and each adult citizen capable of fighting is required to do a two-year term of training to fight. At a moment's notice the citizens of the Fronii can take up arms and stand ready to defend their home from invaders.

However, much of this was possible when the Soli were in control using constructs. Many of the evacuated individuals were members of the Constat Corp. While the Fronii have a few of these constructs still, they do not have the knowledge to repair them and each year the number of constructs at their disposal dwindles. The other difficulty Fronii is having is supplies. From the years of building defenses in a rush, much of their useable farmland has suffered leaving it difficult to feed their people. Defending the Wall of Sacraments has become more difficult each year as sections are breached or collapse from the hasty construction. At its peak, the Wall of Sacraments ran hundreds of miles, constructed of blocks of stone with a backing of earth. Even with their vast knowledge of alchemy, the Soli could not produce enough mortar to properly seat many of the stones of the wall.

This has led to sections being easier to breach and allowing undead through. The Fronii have been forced to abandon the eastern half of the Wall but try to send patrols along it when they can.

Sizable breaches have occurred allowing massive numbers of undead to invade their lands forcing settlements to hope they can weather the tidal waves of undead. In truth the Fronii are spread thin trying to maintain order in their claimed lands.

The Dagan Revival

In the northern forested regions of Anthuli, a collective of Grey Watchers have been gathering people for what they call the Dagan Revival. Dagan was a nation conquered by the Soli which had a long history of being some of the finest cavalry on Anthuli. However, the Soli's constructs could hold their ground against even heavy cavalry charges. This resulted in enormous damage to the horse population on Anthuli, causing the prices for a horse to skyrocket. In the current era of Graewynn, only the wealthy own horses.

To regain their heritage, many among the Dagan Revival have begun hording horses even traveling far to the south to wrangle or steal horses across the continent. Many are afraid of the Dagan Revival because they were once known to be devastating in battle but were content to keep to their territories. Dagan battle tactics focus on lightning skirmishes, inflicting as much damage as possible, and then melting away back into the countryside.

When Dagan was conquered, the Soli found the Doctrine of Dawn struggled to take among the Dagan. Stubbornly they clung to their cultural identity. Even after enacting strict laws against it, many Dagani would outwardly pay lip service to the Soli ideals, but in secret were planning an uprising. However, before they could act, the Daemontide tore through much of their ancestral lands leaving them twisted and corrupted beyond repair. This disrupted much of the Dagani's plans and forced them to flee further north. Today crossing the Daemonwake is dangerous at best, but the Dagani are determined to reclaim what was once theirs.

Those who have come across the Dagani claim they have adopted a nomadic life moving from place-to-place recruiting folk to their cause. Once they have prepared, they intend to take the fight to the Soli and all who once sided with them. Most Dagani see converting to Yemanism willingly as a weakness of character. Willingly submitting to the demands of others is unthinkable to the Dagani. Which has filtered into the way they interact with others. Those who surrender do not deserve to live. Those who fight to the bitter end should be captured and offered one chance to join them. Those who stubbornly refuse are still killed, but quickly and as painlessly as possible.

Culture

Each town within Graewynn has their own unique twist on cultures since so many different types of people and species live within them. Scholars could spend years

documenting and recording the ways of each town and still only scratch the surface.

Clothing

Graewynn's fashion is just as varied as its people. Most Grey Watchers make clothing which will last them and is utilitarian. Aspects of different styles can be found in much of the clothing available to them. In general, most Grey Watchers come from common roots and do not possess much in the way of fine clothing. The few who do are undoubtedly wealthy or a servant of someone wealthy.

Language

Tradespeak is the most common language throughout Anthuli, and the same holds true for Graewynn. Though some wanting to revive the traditions of nations which came before having been attempting to spread the use of older forms of Tradespeak or languages thought snuffed out by the Soli.

Hierarchy

Graewynn exists in a lawless state as the power vacuum caused chaos across the entirety of the region. The closest thing most will find to a hierarchy is a village elder or town mayor.

However, many of the villages and towns still in Graewynn have seen huge increases in their populations because of refugees from small villages fleeing from monsters or bandits seeking shelter among larger towns. It is not an uncommon sight to find abandoned villages slowly falling into ruin dotting the countryside.

Military

Aside from the Fronii, Dagan Revival, and Sai'tren, most settlements within Graewynn only have their local militia to call on if they are attacked. These ragtag forces are comprised of different species all attempting to work together usually without much in the way of true leadership.

If an organized force were to move through Graewynn, they would likely not have much issue wiping out the defenders of most towns, however, many of these militia while untrained or inexperienced can be surprisingly vicious when backed into a corner.

Heraldry

Heraldry within Graewynn have not been around long enough to garner much knowledge of the heraldry of the various groups forming within Graewynn. Many are subsumed within a year or so into other groups, however, the constant shifting political landscape of Graewynn has made it difficult to keep any semblance of historical record on the various heraldry rising within the borders of the Grey Watch.

Aelf'enai

Average Aelf'enai Lifespan: 200 years

Maximum Aelf'enai Lifespan: 250 years

Many people simply refer to the Aelf'enai as elf or elves which many of the Aelf'enai feel is just lazy or even insulting. Aelf'enai are primarily noted as having pointed ears, some Aelf'enai have long pointed ears while others may have short, pointed ears. Aelf'enai are typically slenderer as a people, but exceptions do exist for heavier set or muscular Aelf'enai. A common trait among Aelf'enai is also having uniquely colored eyes, many say this is a trait left over from when they had the power to alter their forms at will.

Regardless, it was rumored the ruler of all Aelf'enai kept the source of their power within a vault within the Aelf'enai capital Ishalinoria. While many speculate on what the source of their power was, it was believed to be some piece of a deity the Aelf'enai used to steal their power and immortality.

In the Times of Gods

Arguably one of the oldest known species on Anthuli, the Aelf'enai have a long history rich in victory, but that history is equally rich in folly. Much of these deeds happened long before the humans, and even the Therios were little more than learning to hunt and gather. If the scrolls jealously guarded by the Aelf'enai are to be believed, the Aelf'enai were once the masters of all they surveyed. So glorious was the Aelf'enai's power, they believed they had surpassed even their gods. In a battle said to have shaken the foundations of reality itself, the Aelf'enai slew their gods and took their power. This power made them immortal, able to shape the world at their whim and travel anywhere they wished with merely a thought. For a time, the Aelf'enai walked the world as they pleased. However, there are conflicting ancient accounts both among the human kingdoms which existed before the Soli converted their people, and Dwearnian libraries which suggested the Aelf'enai were indeed powerful and nigh immortal, however, they could be killed by sword or magic even if age had no effect on them.

Even before history was recorded, the Aelf'enai had organized and been ruled by a monarch. Since Aelf'enai at the time were immortal, monarchs reigned for one century unless they were deposed. It was not uncommon for a monarch to give up the throne after growing bored with ruling.

From the Aelf'enai capital of Ishalinoria, the Aelf'enai monarch oversaw and enforced the laws of their people. It is believed at one point the Aelf'enai had cities across the world, however, Ishalinoria was by far the jewel of them all. Rumored to be built of crystal and gems, Ishalinoria was a shining city of breathtaking beauty. In time all Aelf'enai abandoned their other cities to live in Ishalinoria. With their indeterminate lifespan, children were uncommon among the

Aelf'enai. While they certainly had relationships, most Aelf'enai pregnancies failed.

Spending their days surrounded by beauty, knowledge, and power, many Aelf'enai were said to live in paradise. Many passed their time doing whatever their hearts desired. All this thanks to the power they had taken from their gods.

Aelf'enai would ponder the meanings of the world. Many of the deathless Aelf'enai grew bored of the mortal world as little could impress them or give them any kind of stimulation. Isolating themselves from the fleeting mortal world, the Aelf'enai rarely bothered to leave Ishalinoria unless they were collecting tribute from the mortals beyond the city.

The Accord of the Leaf

For years the Aelf'enai believed themselves to be the most powerful species in the world. However, they soon learned otherwise. Although they could travel at will few had ever encountered Dwearn who were comfortable spreading across the below ground world using the Magma Roads. The first clash between Aelf'enai and Dwearn came when a foolish Aelf'enai discovered a Dwearnian city and thought it would be amusing to use magic to twist them into a more appealing form. However, the Dwearn this Aelf'enai encountered were either resistant or immune to magic which frustrated the Aelf'enai to no end.

Not wishing to be the playthings of an Aelf'enai, the Dwearn fought back. To the Aelf'enai's surprise, the Dwearnian magic could cause harm to an immortal. Bewildered and enraged, the Aelf'enai caused a cave in leaving many Dwearn injured or killed. The Aelf'enai fled, but the Dwearn quickly sent word to the other cities of their kind and preparations were made in case more Aelf'enai came back.

Before long other Dwearnian cities had similar experience with Aelf'enai and war seemed inevitable. Aelf'enai incensed by the Dwearn's ability to harm them, gathered, and planned to punish the Dwearn. As both sides prepared for battle, a third party joined the field. An ancient Treant led a force of Verdanti and Fae declaring they would also fight if the Dwearn and Aelf'enai could not come to agreement. The Dwearn were quick to agree to peace talks, however, the Aelf'enai took their time before agreeing. During the talks, the Treant revealed a prophecy given to them during a dream. The Prophecy told of two ancient powers going to war and the rest of the world suffering for it as they killed each other.

Something in the Treant's words struck a chord among the Aelf'enai who changed their attitudes greatly and seemed much more amenable to averting war. The Dwearn were less convinced but did not want to risk the casualties facing the Aelf'enai. This agreement was called the Accord of the Leaf and it was agreed that every century the two ancient species would meet on neutral ground and resign the treaty to prevent war. Each was charged with managing their own troublemakers during the time of the treaty.

Per the terms of the treaty, the Dwearn had dominion of the world below the ground, and the Aelf'enai would have dominion over the plains and skies. The Verdanti and Fae would reign over the forests and hidden places of the world.

The Rise of the Mad King

Over a thousand years prior to present day, a new ruler took the throne of Ishalinoria by the name of Resh'enor almost 40 years after the signing of the Accord of the Leaf. Unhappy his people were shackled to this agreement, Resh'enor used the power of the Aelf'enai to levitate the entire city of Ishalinoria into the sky. Believing this to be only fitting since the accord gave the Aelf'enai dominion of the skies. Resh'enor was vocal about his disdain for the Accord and the mortals below which caught the attention of the other Aelf'enai. Over the next sixty years, Resh'enor subtly shifted the Aelf'enai's thinking towards they were gods and who were these mortals' placing demands on them.

When Resh'enor claimed the throne, he began to demand larger tributes and expanded those species required to pay tribute. For a time, the Aelf'enai were despised across the world for their greed and arrogance. Although they did not demand tribute from the Dwearn, Verdanti, or Fae, all other species were considered fair game. Powerless to stop the deathless Aelf'enai, many cultures and people suffered for the amusement of the Aelf'enai.

When the Accord of the Leaf was due to be approved again, Resh'enor and his entourage opened the talks with claims the Aelf'enai had ascended to become gods and should be allowed to rule as they see fit. The other three species representatives disagreed, however, the Verdanti did not wish war and the Fae felt the Aelf'enai had gone mad. The Dwearn delegate shot back with a scathing indictment saying the Aelf'enai should be glad of the Accord otherwise they would be wiped out. Even with the Fae and Verdanti urging, the Dwearn representatives and Resh'enor got into a heated argument, and both refused to sign the Accord. Afterward, the Aelf'enai began going to Dwearn cities demanding tribute for the last hundred years.

The Dwearn's stubborn resistance and the Aelf'enai's arrogance turned to war. Many Aelf'enai joined finding the idea of fighting a mortal species novel and believed it would be over swiftly. To their dismay, the Dwearn had been preparing for a long time for this day. Using weapons specially forged to negate magic, the Dwearn could not only wound the Aelf'enai, but proved they were not immortal.

As the War turned in the Dwearn's favor, Resh'enor grew desperate to assert his dominance. Believing the full might of the Aelf'enai threatening the Dwearn's capital would force them to back down. Taking Ishalinoria to the Hymspyd, center of all Dwearnian culture, Resh'enor threatened to level the entire mountain if the Dwearn did not submit to Aelf'enai rule. However, the Hymspyd had been reinforced and augmented making it just as immune to magic as some Dwearn. Seeing the Hymspyd withstand the assault drove Resh'enor's mind to break. In his madness,

Resh'enor ignored the warnings of his ancient advisors and drove Ishalinoria into the Hymspyd. The resulting cataclysm collapsed the Hymspyd but brought Ishalinoria crashing down as well. The Aelf'enai were able to escape, but many were lost, along with the treasure of the Aelf'enai. As Dwearn kingdoms suffered their own miseries, the Aelf'enai found themselves greatly diminished. As their power slowly began to drain away as many Aelf'enai realized their great folly in all of this.

What remained of their species gathered to determine what they would do with their new mortal existence. For many the loss of Ishalinoria was like watching a library burn taking with it immense stores of knowledge gathered over thousands of years.

The Great Schism

Before the Fall, the Aelf'enai were one people, they all shared similar beliefs and reveled in their power. However, after the Fall, many Aelf'enai looked for someone to blame. Four major factions grew out of the Schism. Many Aelf'enai using the last of the godly power they had changed their form to show which faction they had chosen.

The Aelf'enai who felt the old ways were still best, and no other species could reach the heights the Aelf'enai had, became known as the Lahn'esh. Staunch traditionalists, vain, and prone to arrogance, the Lahn'esh are sometimes referred to as High Elves by other species but often fight to be called by their proper name. Lahn'esh still keep to using magic in many forms but have since learned they cannot only use magic like before the fall. Refusing to change their form, the Lahn'esh boast they are what all Aelf'enai should look like.

Seeking to prevent another cataclysm from happening, a large faction of Aelf'enai became known as the Rinshoa. To show their dedication to their humility, they shortened their ears, and took on a more mortal like appearance giving up the ethereal beauty of many ancient Aelf'enai. Seeking to live more humble lives they turned away from much of the pomp and arrogance of the Lahn'esh to become in tune with the natural world. Rinshoa have become protectors of natural places taking on the mantle of caretakers and living lives more simply. As a roundabout way of paying penance, the Rinshoa often keep to themselves only trading with outsiders when their enclaves are in dire need of supplies. Some Rinshoa in their youth often go out into the world to see what the world offers. Many Rinshoa return to their enclaves, finding the world beyond to be full of waste and struggle.

Another faction among the Aelf'enai are the Umbrehk. Taking on the role of watching over their people, they walk among the shadows searching out threats both without and within. Umbrehk have turned away from arrogance, vanity, and instead devote themselves to their duty. In essence, most Umbrehk become experts at scouting, spying, and identifying potential problems before they spread trouble. Many Umbrehk feel it is their duty to ensure another Resh'enor never rises but also protecting Aelf'enai from any

who would do them harm as a people. While they take their duty seriously, the Umbrehk are not dour and enjoy life like any others. It is not uncommon for Umbrehk to also serve as bodyguards or honor guard. When an Umbrehk gives their word, few would ever break it even should it put them at odds with other allies.

Staunchly opposing the actions of their brethren, a large group of Aelf'enai simply chose to remain near the site of Ishalinoria's ruin. These Aelf'enai were less a faction and simply those who refused to leave their home. Most Aelf'enai were so ashamed of their Fall they left Ishalinoria to spread across the rest of the world. However, others sought after the treasures of both the Hymspyd and Ishalinoria. In time, a demonic horde descended upon the site and captured the Aelf'enai who remained. Taken prisoner, these Aelf'enai were given a choice. Give the demons the treasure of the Aelf'enai and bind them to this world or suffer. Whether their refusal was arrogance or knowing what might happen, they resisted for a time.

However, the demons experimented on the Aelf'enai trying to find out how they had used the power they had. Suffering for decades, a group of the Aelf'enai broke and worked with the Demons to give them what they wanted. Using the last of the divine essence, the traitorous Aelf'enai performed the Ritual of Transublimation. This Ritual was tainted by a brave nameless Aelf'enai and instead of giving the demons the power, demons were pulled from the mortal world and locked away in the spirit world. This process was not instantaneous, it took weeks for the ritual to take full effect.

A clever cabal of demons severed their demonic essence preventing them from being pulled into the spirit world permanently, and instead gave them mortal bodies allowing them to remain in the mortal world. These demons who had given up their essence became the Ork'rus. Aelf'enai who had given into the demonic promises were transformed as well into Hobgoblins, as they were more demon than Aelf'enai. Aelf'enai who had continued to resist were scarred by the Ritual but used the chaos of the Ritual's effects to escape seeking out their kin. Forever scarred and twisted by the Ritual of Transublimation, these Aelf'enai became known as Aushenai, or the Twisted. Many Aushenai have tried magic to fix their scarred forms, but found no success, since then, they have turned to alchemy and science to purge the taint in their bodies and souls.

The Aelf'enai of Anthuli and more recent History

Arriving on the shores of Anthuli as the first human kingdoms were forming, the Aelf'enai were quick to make themselves either invaluable to the multitudes of humans or finding their own places away from others. Among the many species living across Anthuli the Aelf'enai were outsiders. Some found their way and allies they could live beside. Much like the Rinshoa with the human tribes of Ercen, and their allies among the plant like Verdantia and bestial Therios.

Many Aelf'enai have resisted converting to Yemanism, often seeing the Soli walking the same path which led to the Fall. Umbrehk have served in many courts across Anthlui, yet rarely do they gather as a group often acting as an intermediary between Aelf'enai enclaves and kingdoms. Lahn'esh have a few towns often taking to embracing art, sophistication, and high society regardless of which kingdoms they found themselves living. Nearly two centuries after the Aelf'enai had come to Anthuli, the first of the Aushenai arrived. Many regarded them as monsters or a threat, but most Aushenai simply wished to find a new life away from where their people had suffered at the hands of the demonic forces.

As the Soli Empire expanded, the Aelf'enai often left towns and cities on the verge of conversion, having an idea of what was coming. Some among the Lahn'esh tried to attach themselves to the Soli as a people of sophistication, but the Lahn'esh's refusal to convert put them at odds with the Soli. As time went on the Aelf'enai found themselves working with many of the nation's trying to resist the Soli's advance. Among the Aelf'enai, some have converted to Yemanism, but they are few and far between. The most common Aelf'enai who converted are the Umbrehk and Aushenai. The Umbrehk often forced to do so to maintain their oaths sworn to patrons who converted. The Aushenai converts believe perhaps through the Soli's advancement or Thaumaturgy, perhaps they can rid themselves of the taint they bear.

Even the Dwearn with their long memory have begrudgingly accepted the Aelf'enai to fight with them during the Expansion Wars finding a common enemy they both wish to fight more than each other.

Culture

While each of the subgroups of the Aelf'enai are different, there are several common traits across all Aelf'enai culture.

Since the Fall, many Aelf'enai prize knowledge. The pursuit of knowledge is one of the most important things a person can do with their lives. This leads many Aelf'enai to study the world around them and what makes it work. Aelf'enai often drive themselves to become masters of their chosen craft and improving upon their previous knowledge becomes almost an all-consuming passion for them.

Many Aelf'enai also have a conflicted opinion on faith. Faithful folks often look at the Aelf'enai as god-killers and do not allow them among the flock. Many Aelf'enai claim there are atheist, but it is also common to find some Aelf'enai who have taken to a faith diligently.

Aushenai Culture

Among the Aushenai, each search for a way to take away their pain. Some turn to the pleasures of life to distract themselves from what they have become while others search for actual cures to their twisted condition. Many believe magic will be unable to help them as they have tried so many different types and forms of magic. So numerous Aushenai have turned to science to learn more about

anything and everything to hopefully find some way to soothe the soul ache each of them feels.

Aushenai feel a pain deep in their souls, as if something is very wrong and they have yet to find a balm for it. Driven to do something, Aushenai seek out all manner of experiences and methods to find some sense of comfort. While some things work briefly, it is not long before the discomfort returns. One side effect of their soul ache, is they are understanding and often empathic of the pains of others.

There are mixed feelings towards the Ork'rus because of the complicated history about how they came about, however, each Aushenai has their own opinions on how to treat the Ork'rus. Some downright hate the Ork'rus as a reminder of what was done to them, others see the failure of the Ritual of Transublimation as penance for what their demonic forebearers did to them.

Lahn'esh Culture

While many Lahn'esh gravitate towards nobility, order, and magic, many among them have considered the mistakes of their forebearers and decided they will not make the same mistakes. Having an intuitive understanding of magic, many Lahn'esh believe they are the authority when it comes to magical theory. There have been some truly epic debates between two Lahn'esh scholars over the accuracy or validity of the knowledge they have collected.

This smug superiority is a complex seen in many, however, the Lahn'esh who take the stories of the Fall to heart can become wise and fair leaders. Lahn'esh are typically found in larger settlements or in secluded enclaves where they practice and experiment with magic seeing just how far they can push their own theories. Most Lahn'esh find themselves in positions to help maintain order in a scholarly way whether it is as a lawyer, scribe, librarian, or leader of soldiers. These callings give them a sense of satisfaction unlike other professions.

Rinshoa Culture

Most Rinshoa have gravitated towards natural places living simple lives being at peace with nature. Some Rinshoa prefer the solitude of the wilds, while others join septes of Ercen to assist their cousins in whatever way they can. Unlike their ancestors, the Rinshoa feel they must atone for the past and work to assist other species the best they can.

Rinshoa can be quick to blame others for mistakes, however, this comes from a strong sense of right and wrong many find they have. It is not uncommon for a Rinshoa to point out an issue to find solution. Though some feel the Rinshoa come across as judgmental or cold. However, in private, many Rinshoa are quite loving and kind. For them they do not wish to see catastrophe because no one will speak up when poor decisions are made.

Umbrehk Culture

Some call the Umbrehk heartless, but to the Umbrehk sometimes a hard choice must be made and swiftly. This is drilled into every Umbrehk early on. Many Umbrehk are cold, calculating, and will not hesitate to act when

necessary. For this reason, most Umbrehk train relentlessly honing their skills to a razors edge.

Even as children, Umbrehk are exposed to the dangers of the world to have survival of the fittest ingrained into them. While harsh, it does help the Umbrehk become excellent scouts, warriors, and protectors. Most Umbrehk are taught their duty is to protect the Aelf'enai from without and from within. Without discipline, many Umbrehk fear another Resh'enor may rise and turn the world against their kind if allowed to flourish unchecked.

Music

Aelf'enai music is often light, whimsical, and intricate. Every note precisely placed to garner emotion and touch the souls of those who hear it. While there are variations in style and composition, much of Aelf'enai composed music and songs have a sense of loss, longing, or tragedy to them. Even their livelier songs many get the sense there's a touch of sorrow hidden in the music.

Often called ethereal, Aelf'enai music is most done with string instruments like harps, lyres, or violins accompanied by pipes and other woodwind instruments.

Artwork

Other species accuse Aelf'enai artists of being perfectionists simply because when an Aelf'enai creates art, every detail is done with painstaking accuracy and detail. Making use of filigrees, complex carving and shapes they often claim are what magic looks like to them, Aelf'enai are known for creating some of the greatest masterworks among artists.

Before the formation of Graewynn, even the Soli coveted Aelf'enai artwork and would grudgingly admit the Aelf'enai were the superior artists. Depictions of living things often have an air of they will bound away if spooked or details which many miss only to realize the intense level of detail included in a work. Many Aelf'enai also use abstract concepts to express themselves. While these works may appear odd to the casual onlooker, to the creator they are often brimming with meaning and intention.

Clothing

Regardless of which faction the Aelf'enai grew up with, they often wear ornately adorned clothing, jewelry and weaponry. Even the mostly humble Rinshoa stylize their equipment to show their craftsmanship and skills. When asked about it, the Aelf'enai will often say it is almost instinctive to decorate their garments and even their skin. Some other species, particularly humans, see even the 'humble' Aelf'enai as somewhat vain and arrogant. Though the worst of the Aelf'enai vanity is seen as hubris of the highest degree with unshakeable confidence in themselves. Some say it manifests in Aelf'enai clothing.

Some say the Aelf'enai often are overdressed for the occasion, however, rarely do Aelf'enai not want to dress to

impress. Even when in armor, Aelf'enai go the extra mile to look good.

Language

Aelf'enai have become secretive of using Aelfen, the ancestral language of their people. Most young Aelf'enai do not learn the ancestral language since it is rarely used outside of ritual or found on the few things still surviving from the time before the Fall. While a flowing and rhythmic language, Aelfen is complicated in there are dozens of ways to say the same thing, but the meanings and inflection can drastically alter a statement. Another issue is there are some conjugations of words which sound similar but completely change the meaning of the word. For example, the word for water can be conjugated to also mean swim, drink, mist, rain, lake, river, drown, fire, weep, and blood. These conjugations are easy to mispronounce making it an extremely difficult language to master.

Hierarchy

In the few places where Aelf'enai live as a collective, usually the wisest among them is asked to lead their people. Since these collectives are rarely more than a few dozen Aelf'enai, there is little to the hierarchy of them as a people.

However, it is common to find Aelf'enai somehow involved in organizations helping to coordinate and ensure goals are met. Few Aelf'enai wish to lead and would rather be in a manager or assistant role. The few Aelf'enai who do lead groups often do so with a passion to achieve their goals rarely seen in other leaders.

Military

Though they are no longer a united people, Aelf'enai often serve in other militaries or warbands as scouts, skirmishers, or spellcasters. This allows them to employ their natural talents for different types of warfare without becoming bogged down by orders from fools. Specialists is a fitting term for the role Aelf'enai play in combat situations.

During the Expansion Wars, many nations would hire Aelf'enai for their expertise to help ensure they had the tools needed to carry out their campaign.

Heraldry

Many Aelf'enai banners are highly decorated and feature magical symbols, natural designs, or elven figures. Many Aelf'enai who bother with heraldry have elaborate and well made banners to help show their pride in their goals.

Dwearn

Average Dwearn Lifespan: 125 years

Maximum Dwearn Lifespan: 150 years

Among the libraries of the few surviving Dwearnian cities, stories tell of the great mountain Hymspyd, believed to be the cradle of all Dwearnian society. Said to be the tallest mountain in the world, Hymspyd pierced well above the clouds, to the great Obshtek, an ancient observatory where the first Dwearn observed the stars. From Hymspyd, the Dwearn expanded across the world, but always longed for the embrace of the depths of Hymspyd. Not many accounts exist of the Dwearn spreading across the world, but many mountain ranges have had discoveries of at least small Dwearn outposts.

The First Dwearn

Legends say the mountains gave birth to a new creature, one nothing like what the world had known, the Dwearn, born of the lifeblood of the world. Only referred to as the Sliath, these proto-Dwearn were closer to Effigies in their physical features. However, the Sliath felt everything unlike Effigies. It is said the Sliath did not confine themselves to beneath the land and instead rose above and saw the natural world and felt a pang of envy for flesh and blood beings. Rather than rage at the flesh and blood creatures of the world the Sliath hid themselves.

In time a miracle happened and a flesh and blood Dwearn was born to the Sliath. Confused by this turn of events, the Sliath nurtured the youngling, teaching them the ways of stone, metal, and magma. In time fleshier Dwearn children were born. As time went on the Sliath slowly faded from the world as their children the Dwearn began to hollow out caverns and make a home for themselves. They say the reason the Dwearn build their homes within mountains is because for them it feels like home or a loving parent's embrace.

Hymspyd, the Mother Mountain

In Dwearn cities, there are murals and artwork of a mountain spearing the heavens Dwearn reverently refer to as the Hymspyd. Stories tell of the Hymspyd being the first city of the Dwearn. Rumored to be the single tallest mountain in the world, the Hymspyd is said to have pierced the clouds and still span several hundred feet above the clouds. In time, the Dwearn had built one of the most technologically advanced cities the world has ever known.

The Dwearn understood how the natural world worked unrivaled by any other Species. They learned how to manipulate materials to produce impressive alloys, chemicals, and medicines. This was only enhanced by using magic woven into the materials they worked. Some Dwearn say they pioneered the art of Infusion. This helped them construct their city within the Hymspyd.

The Magma Roads

The oldest known accounts say the Dwearn built a network of paths they called the Magma Road beneath the ground which could transport their people from mountain to mountain in a fraction of the time it took to travel overland. Some Dwearn historians speculate the Magma Road may have been the means Dwearn have been found in numerous places around the world without so much as a single town in between their mountainous enclaves. Legends say special vessels were used to traverse the Magma Road. These vessels were a work of genius combining magic and technology to help the Dwearn reach new places in relative safety.

More interested in expanding their homes within the mountains they chose, many Dwearn did not interact with other species except to trade. Dwearn were among the first to develop more advanced blacksmithing and masonry techniques giving them an edge over anyone who sought to plunder their mountain homes. While the Dwearn did not usually seek out war, they were no stranger to defending their homes.

Dwearn encountered many species as they spread across the world, but one species always butted heads with the Dwearn. The Aelf'enai, a lithe and long-lived race claimed they were gods and demanded tribute from all they came across. Dwearn being stubborn and proud people, refused to acknowledge the Aelf'enai as anything other than upstarts and tyrants.

The Ancient Rivalry

This rivalry is one of the longest known difficulties between two species across the world. Wars were fought at various times throughout history between the Dwearn and Aelf'enai. Using magic as their main weapon, many Aelf'enai found they struggled to influence the Dwearn like they had other species. These battles escalated until it seemed the entirety of both Aelf'enai and Dwearn were at war with the other. Though these wars were fought centuries before most other species started recording their history. Much of the Dwearn history from before Night Year 898 was lost with the destruction of the Hymspyd and Ishalinoria.

One detail known to every Dwearn is the lord of all Aelf'enai, Resh'enor the Sky King, infuriated that the Dwearn resisted Aelf'enai rule, threatened the Hymspyd itself. The Aelf'enai at the height of their power were able to perform miraculous feats of magic. Resh'enor was known as the Sky King because he had lifted the Aelf'enai capital of Ishalinoria from the land and turned it into a flying city. Moving Ishalinoria near the Hymspyd, something drove the Mad Elf King to crash Ishalinoria into the Hymspyd. Most Dwearn will say it was out of spite for the Dwearn resisting, or something as petty as the Hymspyd stood taller than Ishalinoria ever could, but the fact remains when the Aelf city crashed into the Hymspyd, it set off a cataclysmic chain reaction across the Magma Road. Each Dwearn city connected to the network suffered greatly from eruptions of poisonous gas, uncontrollable flooding, or the fire held deep

beneath the land rising and consuming Dwearn by the thousands.

After the Fall of the Aelf'enai, Dwearn cities were cut off from each other, lacking any way to reach out to their fellow cities. What cities were able to recover slowly began to rebuild, but the process was slow as the Dwearn had to rediscover or reinvent many of their processes for blacksmithing and masonry.

Castes of the Mountain

From the First Dwearn, their children began to exhibit aspects of the Mountain itself. These distinct differences developed into the Castes of the Dwearn. Among the Dwearn, there are three Castes of Dwearn. A Dwearnian Caste was at one time determined by birth, however, after the Fall the Dwearn adapted and now must undergo a rite of passage when they become adolescents.

Roughly translated to Tradespeak, the rite is called the Rite of Heartfire. A young Dwearn spends one year working and living alongside the members of each caste. Once the year ends, they must choose their caste. If a casteless Dwearn is undecided, they may continue to spend time among the castes until they are sure of their decision. Dwearn believe this rite must not be influenced by any but the Dwearn choosing their caste. This process is viewed as a joyous occasion, and only the most insecure or cruel among the Dwearn would interfere with the choice. Once the choice is made, the young Dwearn must bear the markings of their Caste. Not doing so is considered a mark of foolishness and cowardly. Once the choice is made, it is utterly unthinkable for Dwearn to change their Caste.

The Three Castes are the Kerger or Mountain Dwearn, the Hzera or Core Dwearn, and the Krone or Summit Dwearn. Mountain Dwearn are the Dwearn who support the mountain and stand as its first line of defense. Mountain Dwearn are no better or worse than the other castes, but are expected to support the Dwearn outwardly. Most Dwearn seen by the outside world are Mountain Dwearn. In a way the Mountain Dwearn are the body of the Dwearnian species. There are few expectations otherwise. Serving as merchants, couriers, warriors, and farmers among the Dwearn, their work is respected as upholding the traditions of the Dwearn.

The Hzera or Core Dwearn represent the beating heart of the Dwearn. Most Core Dwearn live in the deepest parts of a Dwearn city near what used to be the Magma Roads. Core Dwearn typically prefer the warmth being near the molten blood of the world and utilize the heat and pressure to craft and innovate the designs provided to them by the wise Krone. Core Dwearn differ from other Dwearn in they are inspired to experiment and craft new things rather than rely on tradition. Many Hzera are rebellious and like to push society's boundaries to ensure the Dwearn are doing what is right. Core Dwearn have a strong sense of justice which can border on the fanatical for some. Among even the resourceful Dwearn, Core Dwearn are considered artists when it comes to working a forge, building, or even in

battle. Core Dwearn who do leave the warmth of the lower depths of the Mountain often seek out new experiences to bring them back to the Dwearn or to find ways of doing things better.

Finally, the Krone or Summit Dwearn take refuge among the temples built at the highest points of the mountains they call home, seek to understand the world. Philosophers, faith leaders, and thinkers, the Summit Dwearn are considered the wisest yet the most aloof of all Dwearn. Summit Dwearn are often dreamers and creatives with a medium of words or images rather than crafting or war. Serving as advisors, diplomats, and historians, Summit Dwearn are often seen as celebrities among the more impressionable Dwearn, but most would rather remain in their cold halls free to think and try to understand the world in a more abstract sense. Summit Dwearn seen outside their mountains are generally more interested in exploring how others think or observing the world to further their own thought experiments. While stubborn like all Dwearn, Krone are more likely to change their mind when shown good reason.

While not officially a recognized caste, there is a fourth group of Dwearn represented among their people. In a fanatical attempt to hang onto their lineage, the Order of the First Lineage searches out Dwearn with a direct blood connection to the lineage of the First Dwearn. This lineage is believed to be of the Sliath, who were nearly gods themselves. Rather than stand above like the Aelf'enai, they decided to remain among their mortal kin. In doing so their blood was diluted with mortal blood reducing its potency. Those discovered with a direct blood relation are asked to undergo the Rite of the First.

The Rite of the First is a dangerous ritual, however many Dwearn are willing to undergo it to bring out the power hidden within their blood. During the Ritual, ancient runes are carved into the adherent's skin to try and draw out the hidden potential. If the Dwearn has a strong enough connection to the lineage of the first, the runes will turn golden and find themselves now immune to magic entirely and even more robust than other Dwearn. For those without a strong enough connection, the runes weep blood rapidly and many times kill the young Dwearn. These Dwearn are known as the Mejbok or the Spell Breaker Dwearn, often spoken of in reverence.

Dwearn of Anthuli

On the continent of Anthuli, there were three large Dwearn cities. Each once had their own distinct culture, capabilities, and identity. Before the Magma Roads collapse, the three Dwearn Cities were close, and many considered the other cities like siblings or cousins.

Altyr, City of Steam

The one most folks know of is the city of Altyr. A wealthy city, set in the Altyr mountain range on the southeastern side of Anthuli, it was well known for its wealth of natural resources. Altyr had been a major producer of materials used across every Dwearn city, however, the Fall caused

the Magma Road to flood the deepest levels of their city with molten rock sealing away mountains of riches and resources to be forever encased in stone. For two generations, the Altyr believed they were the only Dwearn still alive. As such, they were extremely paranoid of outsiders and preserving what they believed to be the bloodline of the First Lineage of Dwearn. As such, a new form of ancestor worship developed among the Altyran Dwearn. Family became exceptionally important, and a tradition of holding onto their ways and beliefs became common place.

While the Soli began their expansion, the Altyran Dwearn had rebuilt enough to feel comfortable accepting outsiders and trading with nearby nations. For a time, their economy thrived and the Dwearn began to reintegrate into the world. Seeing the Soli as merely poor copies of the ancient Aelfenai, the Dwearn quickly grew to despise the Soli and their faith. In time the Soli sent a Jartleford delegation to the Dwearn to try and win them over. This met with a conflicted reaction from the Altyr. On one hand, they were thankful more of their kind had survived the Fall. Yet many Altyran Dwearn were angered their kindred had abandoned the Dwearn ways to become the puppets of the Soli.

The Soli's effort inadvertently hardened the resolve of the Altyran Dwearn to bring down the Soli by any means. Holding to their normal taciturn presence, the Altyran Dwearn allowed the Jartlefords to leave with vague promises to consider the offer, yet all Altyrans agreed, the Soli had manipulated the Jartlefords and would not go unpunished for this.

During the Expansion Wars, the Altyr initially simply supplied enemies of the Soli with weapons, while getting even richer in the process. It was not until the 4th and 5th Expansion Wars the Altyr took a more active role in the fight against the Soli. In the 4th Expansion War, Altyran mercenaries hired themselves out at lower rates than normal to the various kingdoms fighting. In the 5th Expansion War, the Altyrans were the architects of the Free People's Alliance.

Along the borders of the Altyran lands, massive trench networks were dug much to the confusion of the Soli forces. It was not until hundreds of Dwearn stood up from the trenches and opened fire using black powder rifles decimating Soli lines. The Altyran front of the 5th was a meat grinder. Even Soli War constructs struggled against barrages of black powder shots and the cannons of the Altyrans.

Jartleford, City of the Lost

On the western side of Anthuli, was the city of Jartleford. Before the Fall Jartleford was known for its staunch military traditions and for their strict honor codes. In the battles with the Aelf'enai, Jartleford were well known for taking the fight to Aelfs and being highly effective. However, few could have predicted what would happen during the Fall.

The Jartleford Dwearn had fared even worse than the Altyran Dwearn. The Jartleford were nearly wiped out as poison gas and magma tore their city apart. Of the tens of thousands of Jartleford Dwearn alive when the Fall happened, a few hundred survived. Between chambers filled with lingering poison, or pathways sealed by molten rock, the Jartleford believed they would be dead within a few generations. However, the Dwearnian stubbornness proved too much even for a cataclysm. The Jartlefords survived, though their numbers gradually dwindled. Much of their past traditions were lost with each new generation, the only thing they retained is their utmost respect for honor and keeping their word.

It was not until the Soli discovered their cities and managed to clear a path back to the surface. Thankful to the Soli for their aid, the Jartlefords pledge their undying loyalty to the Soli, their saviors. For the next several generations, the Jartleford thrived and grew, rebuilding their home while the Soli spread the word of Yemanism across the continent. By the end of the 5th Expansion War, the Jartleford had reclaimed about a third of the area their city had originally encompassed. Progress was slow due to the process to remove or neutralize the poison gas was dangerous and difficult. Even using constructs, cave ins, explosions of the gas and pockets of magma made it difficult to reclaim their home.

In time, both the Altyr and Jartleford learned of each other. The Jartleford looked forward to rejoining their brethren and sharing the wonders of the Soli with them. However, the Altyran Dwearn saw the Jartleford's abandonment of their roots as sacrilege. At first the Altyr wanted to take in the Jartleford to teach them of their history. However, no compromise could be found because the Jartleford had sworn to protect the Soli. In time, many Altyrans came to despise the Jartleford, and the Jartleford view the Altyrans with disappointment for not being able to see they could be better off with the Soli.

During the Expansion Wars, the Jartlefords served as the guardians of the pathways into and out of Sol. Serving as guards, toll collectors, and escorts for dignitaries, the Jartleford were happy to once again be thriving rather than struggling to survive. However, during the 5th Expansion War the Jartleford were pushed to the limit by the Daemontide. As the hordes of demonic creatures rushed the Mythos Gate, the Jartleford met them with staunch resistance. For weeks the Jartleford suffered losses. Each Dwearn killed had their soul claimed and used as fuel to feed the ravenous demons.

The efforts of Gregori Suvenos prevented more Jartleford souls from being lost but could not prevent Dwearn from dying. The souls animated the Dwearnian armor and in many ways had discovered a crude method of creating sentient constructs much like Effigies. With the return of many Soli forces and the Order of the Breaking Dawn breaking the horde, many Jartleford are now dedicated to being prepared for the next time someone tries to breach the gates to their cities.

Dal Umma, the Doomed Mountain

A third Dwearnian city existed, however, no Dwearn survived the violent upheavals of the Fall. Ruins of a Dwearn city were discovered within the Kragnen mountains near the center of Anthuli. Altyr have identified the city as Dal Umma, once a places of artists, poets, and learning. No one is entirely sure what happened in Kragnen during the Fall, but the ruins are seen as cursed. Few who go into the Dal Umma ruins ever return the same. Stories of strange happenings within the ruins abound. Unnaturally moving shadows, whispers within the dark, and sounds of movement just outside of any light are all common among the stories told by those brave or foolish enough to enter the ruins.

Some have become obsessed with excavating the ruins and finding what secrets may have been lost. Each expedition has ended in madness. Even those who are able to return with stones from Dal Umma have suffered misfortune from nightmares to being found dead even weeks later.

Altyran Steam Technology

The Altyran have begun developing technology using steam power to provide an edge against the Soli for the Free People's alliance. While still in its nascent stages, the Dwearn believe it will help combat the Soli's next marvel revealed to them by their God-Child. From this they have developed black powder rifles to help combat the Soli's cartridge designs. Dwearn black powder is more powerful than cartridge guns, the Dwearn have not mastered a way to keep the power of their black powder weapons and allow multiple shots unlike Soli cartridge guns. Alongside these weapons which are easier to mass produce than cartridge guns, the Dwearn have worked on ways to provide heat and other useful innovations to the Alliance.

Culture

In Dwearnian culture, it is important to respect the privacy of a family. Dwearnian family matters are considered only the business of members of that family. Whether chosen family or by blood, the Dwearn regard interpersonal matters as private affairs. It is considered proper for many Dwearn to remain reserved with outsiders and only share their true selves with their family.

However, many Core Dwearn scoff at this notion as their emotions tend to run hot like the blood in their veins. Summit Dwearn often keeps to this ideal while still at times being lost to the stars and sky. Mountain Dwearn typically has a mixed attitude some embrace this ideal of stoicism, while others agree more with the Core Dwearn.

Dwearn are also partial to durable architecture, clothing, and even their artwork is built to last. Dwearn, find they prefer things to last rather than be fleeting. Because of this Dwearn relationships are commonly long term. Even when relationships struggle, Dwearn will stubbornly try to work on them, or they explode because neither side wants to admit they were wrong.

Another aspect of Dwearn culture is alcohol. Many Dwearn think themselves connoisseurs of fine spirits. They like thick hearty stouts and distilled spirits with punch. Brewmasters among the Dwearn have a more discerning palette and often host Keg Gatherings where they will let others sample dozens of beers, wines, or harder alcohols.

Faith is another important factor for Dwearn. Many Dwearn become dedicated followers if they choose to join a faith. Once the Dwearn has made up their mind, it becomes difficult to change it especially when it comes to matters of beliefs.

Music

Dwearn appreciate steady rhythmic music in most cases. Some have called Dwearn music repetitive because several elements are often repeated. Dwearn also compose operas to tell of the epics of their people. There are specialist architects who have found ways to fine tune the acoustics of caverns to help opera singers carry their voices across huge areas.

However, numerous Core Dwearn have also begun experimenting with Ork'rus styles of music involving a great deal of growling and deep singing while using percussive instruments and several kinds of bass instruments to make intense powerful music.

Artwork

Dwearn artwork is often tied to architecture, carved stone, and shaped metal. Some criticize Dwearn artwork for its hard lines and art deco styles. Despite their more geometric style, Dwearn do often use abstract concepts in their work to help represent important things. An important quality for most Dwearn artists is to ensure make perfectly straight lines and curves when used.

Clothing

Dwearn prefer practical clothing often made from durable fabrics or leathers, but many Dwearn are also at home in a suit of armor. Ceremonial clothing among the Dwearn is often decorated with finely made precious metals either in plates or fine wire. Dwearn prefer their clothing to be close fitting, but rarely tight allowing them to move freely, but not in excess to get caught while going about their business. When the Dwearn want to impress foreigners, they will flaunt what wealth they have often in large flashy jewelry, or clothing weighed down with precious stones and metals.

Another common aspect of Dwearn fashion is how they wear their beard or a braid. Warriors tend to wear a long heavy braid either in their beard or hair as a sign of their prowess. Other Dwearn often use beads, metal bands, and precious stones weaved into their hair or beards. The more braids a Dwearn wears suggests wealth, power, or merely a confidence in their own abilities. Shorter hair or beards is a sign of humility or not needing to show off their prowess. Shaving both beard and hair for Dwearn is often a sign of

penance, though it has fallen out of fashion in more recent years.

Language

The average Dwearn speaks Tradespeak almost exclusively. Only those with an exceptional interest in Dwearnian history learn the Dwearnian Runga (ROON-gah). Runga is a language which comes across as harsh and does not convey more abstract concepts well. Historians believe much of Runga was lost in the Fall but does trace its roots back to the First Dwearn. While Runga works well for conveying instructions in exacting detail, it does not have words for the depth of experience. Runga does not have words for variations in color, nuanced emotion, or artistic styles. The only groups who keep the information of Runga alive are the Mejbok and some more traditionalist Krone Dwearn specializing in discovering what the Dwearn could do before the Fall.

Hierarchy

Among the Altyrans, they use a council of figures each with a particular area of influence. There are 8 major council seats and several minor ones.

- **Seat of the Axe** – Handles military matters such as strategy, deployment, and logistics for war efforts.
- **Seat of the Coin** – Handles taxes, the treasury, and trade policy with other counties.
- **Seat of the Quill** – Handles foreign diplomatic matters and policy for immigrants.
- **Seat of Medicine** – Handles research and distribution of medicine to the Dwearn.
- **Seat of the Table** – Handles agricultural concerns and ensuring the Altyrans are fed.
- **Seat of the Pick** – Handles mining concerns and often involved in construction projects around Altyran outposts.
- **Seat of the Law** – Handles making law and handling enforcement of those laws.
- **Seat of the Book** – Responsible for preserving the history of the Dwearn and recording events for historical purposes.
- **Seat of the Arcane** – Regulates the use of magic and must give approval for magical research.

The Jartleford have been given an honorary noble's station allowed to participate within Sol, which most consider to be a high honor. However, this title does not convey the same respect as trueborn Soli nobles. However, this does allow some Dwearn to command other nobles outside the homeland when necessary.

Military

Based on traditional methods, Altyran Dwearn tactics involve fighting from a position of strength. Dwearn tactics often feel as if they are stalling for time, but in truth they are waiting until they can strike from an advantageous place.

Dwearn forces are organized into four kinds of units. Phalanx units use large heavy shields to hold positions or

push to take ground. Dwearn shield wall tactics are difficult to break if the unit is experienced. Every Phalanx is accompanied by either a Berserker squad, Heavy spears, or a Thunderer unit.

Berserker units utilize great weapons or dual wielding as anti-infantry units. Light infantry are generally easy prey for Berserker units. Focused more on skirmishing than sustained fighting, many use Phalanx units as cover to get close enough to ensure they will take fewer losses and then break off and tear out the soft underbelly of an enemy line.

Heavy Spears generally stay with Phalanx to hold positions or receive charges.

Thunderer units utilize Black powder weapons. Whether paired with Phalanx units to bring down heavy targets or used individual to hold positions against enemy melee units, when a Thunderer unit lets loose, even those miles off know a Thunderer unit is nearby.

Heraldry

Dwearnian Heraldry is often portrayed more on tunics, brooches, or even rings rather than banners. Many devices of the Dwearn are often blocky and reflect durable concepts such as stone, armor, hammers, axes, or powerful animals.

Effigies

Average Effigy Lifespan: Unknown

Maximum Effigy Lifespan: Believed unable to die of old age.

No one is quite sure when the first Effigy came to consciousness, however, they have played significant roles throughout the history of Anthuli. An Effigy is a humanoid shaped animated being made of inanimate materials. Few understand how this process occurs and to this day is a mystery. Whether made of metal like a suit of armor, a statue, crafted from once living materials such as wood or dead flesh, Effigies are a phenomenon most people of Anthuli did not have any experience with until after the 5th Expansion War. Until the Battle of Mythos Gates, it is suspected fewer than a dozen effigies existed at one time. After the Battle of Mythos Gates, Effigies became a common sight throughout Anthuli. Though ancient Effigy do exist, they often hide themselves away from the world until they fade away or await when they are needed again.

Effigies do not experience the world like most beings, while they have a form of sight, hearing, and can feel pressure, they do not feel pain, or the physical stimuli associated with emotions. For most Effigies, they understand the theory of emotions, but do not comprehend the reactions of most of their neighbors. Since they do not experience these things directly, many Effigies can be seen as blunt, abrupt, or somewhat distant. Despite this, some Effigies have found their way into positions as advisors, inspectors, and crafters. Their analytical view of the world often helps them see past the emotions other folks may have and get to the heart of a matter.

Some question what it is that makes an Effigy function. Since Effigies can be repaired like armor or a statue, what of their form carries the animating force. The current theory is additions to their form are suffused with this animating energy making it part of the Effigy, like how Ghost Mortaeans incorporate new clothing or armor into their form through a form of possession. There is clearly some difference between the two, however, most scholars continue to argue what the difference is exactly. The most accepted theory is Ghost Mortaeans do not pass on and grasp for anything they can to remain in the world. The souls of an Effigy have passed into the afterlife and are sent back with purpose. However, the Effigies from the Mythos Gate have thrown a large exception into this theory.

There is a theory being spread suggesting the primary difference between the animating force of an Effigy and a Ghost is related to the Entropy in the region. While this is not entirely the cause of the difference, it has been recorded that Effigies generally awaken in regions less corrupted by Entropy than places like the Daemonwake or in Agrineas.

Effigies Prior to the Battle of Mythos Gates

While there are historical records of Effigies, Effigies have not played an open role in history. Most references to Effigies are as oracles, mentors, and guides helping others find their path. Many believed these beings were sent by the deities to help guide mortals chosen for something greater. Scholars say this is unlikely because many references in history do suggest Effigies have guided and taught, but not everyone trained by Effigies became influencers on history.

Perhaps it is because Effigies live forever unless they are destroyed and simply felt the urge to pass on the things they had learned over long lives. However, their lives are rarely one long life. Effigies in history have taken long periods of a hibernation like sleep which seems to help them pass from one age to the next. However, this hibernation does come with draw backs. Effigies tend to forget things or find that their memories struggle to keep events in order.

While Effigies can be impressive sources of knowledge, it can become challenging to keep the information organized. It is unknown if the Effigies noted in history are a small collective of beings simply passing from age to another or if they have been new individuals. Descriptions change, but some wonder if this could merely be interpretations of events from different authors confusing details.

The Battle of Mythos Gates

During the darkest times of the 5th Expansion War, all sides were becoming more and more desperate as the war ground lives into ash. A hidden and heretical group of Gethral snuck behind the Soli battle lines and fell upon a village whose name has been stricken from the Holy Texts of Yemanism because it birthed one of the greatest horrors the Soli have ever known. Using the villagers as offerings, this heretical sect opened a tear in the veil between the mortal and spirit realms. Demons poured through consuming the mortal offerings and tethering themselves to those not immediately devoured. Seeking to punish the Soli's arrogance, this group and their summoned abominations moved from village to village consuming more souls and growing in number and strength. As the powerful energies of the demons seeped into the land, it was transformed. Left barren and twisted, to this day nothing grows there except the mutated trees devoid of leaves.

As this band grew in number, they became known as the Daemontide. They rampaged across the northern parts of Anthuli, cutting a path towards Sol, intent on destroying it with the horde they gathered on the way there. Faith failed those who did not believe, and many were tragically consumed before this growing tidal wave of monsters. When word reached the Soli lines, they were forced to make difficult decisions. Numerous units were sent to try and stop the Daemontide, but none ever returned. In time the Soli were forced to abandon the assault on the Gethral Wastes which had been a bloody stalemate to that point.

Surprisingly, the Gethral did not pursue, as the news of what had transpired reached many of the Gethral battle leaders. While the Soli hastily broke camp to pursue the Daemontide, the Gethral stayed their hands and simply watched as the Soli marched home. Rumors suggest even the battle hungry Gethral were horrified their people would unleash such monstrosities upon the world. Allowed to leave unmolested, the Soli raced towards Sol hoping to reinforce the meager defenses left behind.

When the Daemontide arrived at the Jartleford Mountains, they fanned out and consumed every village, town, and hold they could find. None were spared, allowing the Daemontide to swell with thousands of vicious nightmarish creatures. Unaccustomed to siege battles, the Daemontide was stalled all along the mountains, even when Behemoths crashed against the mighty gates of the Jartleford, the Dwearn held the line. Every Dwearn who fell had their soul ripped from their body, consumed, and the body possessed by an ephemeral demon waiting for a chance to join the fight. An alchemist known as Gregori Suvenos brought what many thought were good luck charms to the Dwearn defenders. In truth the item was an enchanted stone which would store souls to help prevent the Dwearn's bodies and souls from feeding the Daemontide. As streams of blood slicked the steps to the battlements of the Gates, the Daemons found their advantage of numbers was beginning to thin. They could no longer use the fallen Dwearn to reinforce themselves, and much to their surprise, the Dwearn appeared to fight well beyond what they had before.

The charms Suvenos had given to the soldiers had worked as intended but had a strange side effect. While the body in the armor may have died, the soul, desperate to continue the fight was able to animate the fallen warrior's armor. For days, Dwearn kept fighting thinking they had the blessing of El'Yemana on their side giving them endurance to fight back. It was not until the ride of the Dawnbringers, a powerful collection of Soli knights, lead a spearhead attack piercing through to the heart of the horde. Between the Dawnbringers, the fallen Dwearn armors, and the arrival of weary but determined reinforcements, the Daemontide was caught in a hammer and anvil scenario. In the aftermath, the knowledge of the animated armors came to light. Many feared what this meant, but the Yemanist Clergy claimed it as a miracle sent by El'Yemana to preserve her chosen people. The animated Dwearn armor was hailed as a holy defender and celebrated for their bravery and sacrifice.

Hundreds of these new warriors had to come to terms with once being alive, and now were merely animated suits of armor. Many of them had lost much of their memories, as the charms Suvenos had provided were not perfected, many only knew they awoke in battle and had to fight to survive. After the events of the Battle of Mythos Gate, across Anthuli, more Effigies began appearing. The Yemanists claim many of these are the reincarnated spirits of those who fell to the Daemontide or the disembodied spirits of demons finding hosts depending on the Effigy's stance towards the Soli. While no one is certain what this

means, many fear it is just foreshadowing of events to come.

The Effigy Phenomena

There are many different theories as to why Effigies were once far rarer or where they come from. However, one distressing fact many folks ponder is what other lingering effects of the Battle of Mythos Gate could there be which have not fully manifested yet. Many intrepid magus, tinkerers, and even holy people have attempted to artificially create Effigies, but most have failed. Many outside the Soli Empire hope Gregori Suvenos's charms were a fluke and perhaps it was merely a miracle by a goddess.

Harnessing the ability to move a soul into an inanimate form must come with other side effects beyond a simple loss of memory. Several small faiths in Graewynn believe the Effigies are soulless creations meant to drag them into the spirit world to become the plaything of some powerful spirit. With the smallest population of any Species on Anthuli, the Effigies have been dragged into the troubles of the continent and many must choose where their loyalties lie.

It is hard to say how many Effigies awaken each year, however, unlike in ages past, most villages know of the existence of these animated humanoid forms by now. Only the most remote or isolationist places are unaware of the existence of Effigies.

When Effigies pass on, some less reverent scholars have pulled apart their forms looking for what may animate them, and to date no one has found anything which seems to obviously be present in the form.

Types of Effigies

Dwearn Armor is not the only thing animated by whatever force causes an Effigy to spring to life. To date a few scholars have agreed there are four primary types of Effigies. Much like the Dwearn who fell, many Effigies come into the world without prior knowledge which has led to many assuming it may be a form of possession, but not in the traditional sense.

First, like the Dwearn from the Mythos Gate, are the Metallic Effigies. These animated suits of armor, or even humanoid shaped masses of primarily metals are incredibly durable, shrugging off blows which would leave most other living beings grievously injured. Metal Effigies commonly display a strong sense of duty and honor, though there are exceptions. Some believe it is because so many appear as animated armors. What differentiates a Metallic Effigy from a Ghostly Mortaeon is their response to necromantic and healing energies. Mortaeans recoil and feel pain from healing magic yet are restored by festering magic. Metallic Effigies on the other hand are not harmed by healing magics, though they are less effective, and are harmed by the magic of death like living beings. While this may seem like a strange distinction, it does hold true and is why they are classified as two different types of beings.

Second are the Stone Effigies, referenced back to the Age of Heroes, Stone Effigies were once believed to be mysterious beings who would seek out heroes and help them on their journey to achieve their destiny. However, in more recent times Stone Effigies have appeared without some mysterious cause and have simply wished to live as any normal person may. Much like their metallic kin, Stone Effigies shrug off bone shattering force and some can even turn themselves into a boulder providing protection from shots and even magic to those quick enough to duck for cover. A sense of properness is seen in many Effigies, often manifesting in politeness, and expecting the same in return or having grandiose ideas but rather than being swept up in the dream, plan and scheme for ways to make this dream come true.

Nearly as old as the Stone Effigies in stories, are the Botanic Effigies. Made from wood and other plant matter formed into a humanoid shape, the Botanic Effigies are typically omens of danger ahead bringing with them word of encroaching evil. Many villages have prepared themselves for the worst in history when a Botanic Effigy has given its dire portents. After the Mythos Gate however, like the Stone Effigies, Botanics have appeared with no forewarning and no message to warn others. Whether vines which grew in the rough shape of a humanoid, scarecrows in the fields jumping off their posts, or even large rag dolls suddenly springing to life, Botanic Effigies have scared many folks with their sudden appearances. Many Botanic Effigies keep watch for dangers and find themselves most content when they know the homes, they have chosen are safe and well-guarded.

Finally, are the Graveborn Effigies. Unlike their other kin, Graveborn are frightful in appearance, and even stranger in purpose. No one is sure where they first appeared, but some believe these Effigies may be the result of something frightful coming out of the Agrinean Swamps. Graveborn are patchwork creations made from dead flesh but given a humanoid shape. While the appearance of Graveborn is eerily similar to a Mortaeans, unlike their kin, Graveborn are healed by the festering magics of Necromancy. However, unlike other Mortaeans, Graveborn do not retain an identity from before they rise and are generally constructed of several bodies rather than simply an undead twist of the original body. The most important distinction is the lack of an identity from before they awoke. Mortaeans retain much of who they were while they were alive. Graveborn have no recollection of who they were, and their bodies are not made from a single person's body. Many Graveborn find themselves feared and reviled due to their bizarre forms and undeath like state. However, a few Graveborn have established themselves as useful to communities and been granted a home among communities unafraid of the stitched forms of the Graveborn.

Culture

Effigies commonly adopt whatever culture they first encounter in many ways. Newly awakened Effigies must come to terms with constructing an identity which most biological species have had decades to build. Though they

pick up on things quickly, most Effigies when they first awaken are like babies, struggling to learn how to walk or care for themselves. Some Effigies have been mistaken for constructs and treated as such. This treatment can leave Effigies feeling abused, but when they first begin to speak is the moment their owner has showing the construct may be more than a simple mindless automaton.

This has led to some Effigies to become cruel, having their early experiences shaped by evil minded people. Many of the newly awakening Effigies were forced into training for nefarious purposes. The Soli have been actively seeking out newly awakened Effigies to train them for their purposes. While Constructs are strong, Effigies can think for themselves and make far more useful soldiers who do not require food and can be easily repaired.

Unfortunately, this leaves an impression on those Effigy and people who have tried to free them learn the Effigies struggle to adapt to their newfound freedom.

Music

Effigies have proven they are adept at performing songs and music. Much like many other things, the Effigies mimic styles they are exposed to, but what many find interesting is some Effigies have taken to using their own bodies to perform music. Some Effigies have even had artisans build musical instruments into their bodies. Metallic Effigies and Botanics are the most common types to do this.

Metallics utilize the vibrations of their forms to help influence the music, while Botanics have had woodwinds carved into the wood of their body. Some have found this practice a bit disturbing, but many find the performance quite novel.

Artwork

In a somewhat surprising turn, Effigies with an eye for artwork have taken to having their forms altered or sculpted into artistic forms. This form of body modification has become quite fashionable in high society circles. While some have taken to forms of beauty and precision, others have taken to having their forms turned into fearsome figures to instill fear and discomfort in those around them.

Stone Effigies have taken special interest in statuary and methods to carve statues. For some it is a method of trying to find meaning in their form and shape while others hope one day one of their creations may spring to life and be their companion.

Graveborn Effigies have struggled to do the same but with flesh and bone. However, even if they can hide their scars and other blemishes, flesh rarely remains pristine and will begin to show signs of rot.

Language

Effigies pick up on languages surprisingly fast compared to most species. Whether this is some innate gift, or their

minds simply take in knowledge much faster after they awoken is a debate argued among many scholars.

Hierarchy

Effigies rarely find themselves in positions of leadership but do well in support roles. The Effigies who do find themselves leading had it thrust upon them because no one else could do it as well as they could. Effigy leaders are often ruthlessly efficient and expect a lot out of their people, but it is more because they like things to work instead of worrying about a cog in the works not pulling their own weight.

Military

In battle, Effigies make for fierce opponents. Much of what puts flesh and blood troops out of battle are nothing to an Effigy. Able to shrug off so many ailments which would normally lay a soldier on the verge of death make Effigies ideal soldiers. Along with not requiring food, Effigies can go to war simply with their equipment and some materials most smiths would use any way to repair them.

Rumors suggest the Soli are trying to build an army of Effigies for the next Expansion War to use against their flesh and blood enemies. Between the modifications possible to an Effigy and their innate resilience, if these rumors are true, the Free Peoples of Anthuli are going to be at a huge disadvantage.

Heraldry

Most Effigies will simply adopt the heraldry of others or forego caring for heraldry all together. Effigies make up such a small portion of the Graewynn population, it is uncommon for an Effigy to care for a personal device or crest unless they find themselves leading an army.

Fae

Average Fae Lifespan: 90 years

Maximum Fae Lifespan: 150 years

Undoubtedly one of the odder species identified, the Fae are viewed as a hodgepodge of species which did not fit other places, however, there is an underlying current common between all Fae which no other species shares. Each Fae has an intense connection to their own form of joy. Some call it a sense of wonder, innocence, or even a thrill for living. While each subgroup of Fae expresses their wonderment differently, all Fae who lose this joy become bitter, cold, and often malicious. Fae are often described as otherworldly with their vibrant love of life, or their intense callousness when their joy is lost. There is no one way for a Fae to lose their joy, however, it often is a result of several instances where the world and the people around them show indifference, a lack of creativity, or something happens which destroys their sense of wonder. When a Fae loses their wonderment, they are referred to as Lost Fae.

To be clear, there are also the Wild Fae, spiritual creatures powerful enough to be drawn into the spirit world when other similar creatures were drawn out of this world. Wild Fae are closer to spirits in form, but have similar traits to Fae. Scholars have observed Wild Fae interacting favorably with mortal Fae as if interacting with a distant cousin, there is certainly a familiarity, but like cousins only seen once every few years, there is not necessarily warmth.

Wild Fae are powerful and able to wield mysterious powers not quite the same as magic, but equally as mystifying. Among Wild Fae, the most powerful are known as Fae Regents. Regents are immortal, dangerous, and capricious. Only a fool would risk the ire of a Fae Regent. Some have likened Fae Regents to demi-gods because of their varied and strange powers which can twist the world in bizarre ways.

A Tale of Ancient History and the First Court

Presumably, the Fae are an ancient species which has predated surviving modern texts much like the Aelf'enai, Dwearn, and Verdanti. Oral histories have suggested the Fae are as old if not older than the Aelf'enai. A recurring legend is the Fae were the first sentient species. However, rather than conquer or oppress other sentient species, many Fae look at other sentient beings as younger siblings or cousins. The Fae nurtured and helped new species find joy in the world around them, but also gave them cautionary tales of the dangers in the unknown.

In turn, new species often viewed the Fae as mentors, counselors, and teachers. Even the most powerful of the Fae Regents were gentle and kind. However, at some point in history one species felt they knew better than the Fae and took everything they had been taught and murdered a Fae beloved by many. This event caused many Fae to lose their joy and feel bitter and calloused towards the other

species. These Lost Fae took it upon themselves to teach the upstart species a lesson. The Lost Fae took everything from the species and in time the species is said to have become something else entirely refusing to let go of one thing having become aware of how things were taken from them.

However, their revenge did not fix how they felt, and the Lost turned their attention on others. The Regents were forced to take the Lost Fae into custody and investigate this issue. To the horror of many, even Fae Regents had succumbed to becoming Lost. Rather than risk conflict, the Regents formed the First Court. It was comprised of both Joyous and Lost Regents. Though the Joyous Regents outnumbered the Lost Regents, they knew it would not be wise to risk open conflict with them. Even in their joyless state, the Lost Regents agreed to abide by the rulings of the First Court. Sealed within each of the Regents was the Law of the Scales. Throughout history as one side of the court gains more influence, then concessions must be given to the other side of the Court.

If the Joyous Fae grew strong, in time the Lost would have more influence over decisions and direction of the Court and vice versa. This was to find a compromise between the Regents. As the centuries went by the Court operated much like a pendulum, when power swung one way, the other side would be given control of the court. Over time more Regents became lost until the Court was evenly divided between the Joyous and Lost. Much of this came from the Court's decision to pull away from other species and observe them.

Without the guidance of the Joyous, many species fell into barbarism and vice. Within the shadows of the world the Lost Regents helped foment some of the discord in the world to earn other Fae to their cause. Carefully operating through the mortal species, they were able to show the Joyous Regents mortals were debased and cruel. When this manipulation came to light, the Joyous decided to fight back in the same way. Since the court had forbidden direct conflict between Regents, they turned to the mortals to fight a proxy war for them. The Joyous gave dreams, hope, and inspiration while the Lost gave nightmares, anxiety, and fear.

A Tragic Act of Rebellion

These games played by the Regents left many feeling the Regents simply using others to battle one another. Many minor Fae felt it had gone on long enough. Ashamed of what the Regents, who were supposed to represent the best of their kind, had done, many Fae refused to obey the First Court's orders to deliver their manipulations. For this disobedience, the Lost Regents cursed the willful Fae with mortality and cast them out of the Court. However, this tipped the scales into the favor of the Joyful. As an act of mercy, the Joyful granted the Fae the Joy to mortals and would only allow it to be lost when the world had become too much for them.

This act created the modern mortal Fae. Each of them begins life with a sense of wonderment and a focus on the present rather than letting them dwell on the past or what had been taken from them. Told by most mortal Fae elders to children, this story is one of the few pre-recorded history things to have survived from the ancient times.

The History of Mortal Fae

Records of the Fae are all third hand at best because many Fae would rather stay focused on pursuing their passions. The most complete history is the genealogical records of the Holminn families and settlements. While many find these endless tomes of who beget who are terribly boring, it can be used to track movements of the Fae across Anthuli and possibly beyond. Some journals and diaries passed down through these settlements let historians get a sense of the other Fae documented in entries of visitors. The earliest entries are some of the oldest documents known to exist. Theories suggesting the Fae may have used the first written language, even before the Aelf'enai. It is believed the Fae first landed on Anthuli while most Human Nations were still primitive societies. Fae have appeared in the records of the Human nations for generations.

While the Fae chose to stay out of the affairs of Nations, it was not uncommon for Fae to be companions of vibrant personalities such as artists, heroes, inventors, or folks even founding new settlements. Many common folk view the presence of Fae as a sign of a change in fortune. If the Fae still has their joy, it is a sign of good luck and good times soon. However, if a Fae who lost their joy is present, it is a sign of misfortune and dark times ahead. This is reinforced by centuries of tales told across Anthuli. Despite the larger-than-life nature of many Fae, few wish to be the focus of the tale.

Most Fae are happiest as the companion to others making great changes and will go out of their way to help them succeed. The strange part is Fae who have lost their joy often find themselves the antagonist in the story of another person, giving them a foe to test their mettle or best to become the hero. It is unknown whether this is some dark fate of the Lost Fae, or if Fae simply seek out other people to help them achieve their goals.

The Accord of the Leaf

The earliest known gathering of many Fae was to participate in the Accord of the Leaf. Seeing the trouble coming as the Aelf'enai and Dwearn squared off, they knew this was dangerous for many reasons. The initial signing of the Accord was a cause for much celebration. However, in the years after the Accord was signed, the Fae attempted to guide the Aelf'enai and Dwearn to ensure the Accord would hold, however, the Aelf'enai viewed the Fae as an adorable nuisance and some Aelfs even tried to keep Fae as pets rather than valuing their insight. Dwearn were just as guilty refusing to see the wisdom in the warnings given to them.

After seeing both species refuse their wisdom and guidance, many Fae lost themselves and simply did not care if the two species killed each other. When the Accord

came up to be renegotiated, the Fae delegates were indifferent having assumed the outcome of the talks. Rather than waste their words they simply ensured they would not be caught in the crossfire and spread across Anthuli. This was the last time any large gathering of Fae attempted to intervene for the betterment of a whole species. Most felt focusing on individuals to assist them in leading and teaching others a better way was the only way they could help their cousins.

Since the Fall

Since the Fall of the Aelf'enai, the Fae have spread across Anthuli and can be found within every nation. Few hold true loyalty to nations or large gatherings, preferring personal relationships. Only the Soli had never heard of or seen a Fae until they learned of the greater part of Anthuli. Even as they spread the word of Yemanism, the Fae found cause to assist or antagonize the Soli.

At first many naïve joyful Fae felt the Soli may be a group who could help unify people and bring an era of peace. Yemanism taken at its word sounded like a beautiful idea. However, many Fae even those who converted, soon learned the twisting of words was a skill share by the Soli and the Fae Regents.

As the Expansion Wars raged, more and more Fae were becoming joyless because of the folly of people. Even those who had tried again and again to create improvement through teaching and aiding folks they felt could change the outcome many times found their charges would miss the mark or twist their guidance to their own ends. Each new war escalated, and the devastation left behind only served to prove more pessimistic Fae right.

Even the Lost Fae were disgusted by the acts committed by the younger species. The few who chose to actively oppose one side or the other found they were swept up in the fighting and their message lost in the din of battle. Before the end of the 5th Expansion War many Fae both Joyful and Lost began to come together to discuss the current events and though their methods were diametrically opposed, they agreed the people of Anthuli were heading towards a terrible fate. For the first time since the Fae were made mortal, they agreed something must change or else something cataclysmic would happen. Many mortal Fae Courts began seeing overwhelming numbers of Fae coming to express their concerns and fears.

The Mortal Fae Courts

A gathering of Fae is called a Court. While not common, when Fae do gather in any number, they will gather and discuss their activities often accompanied by celebrations, meals, and truly epic contests. The Courts of Fae do prefer to keep their business within their own Courts and not involve outsiders. When asked, most Fae say it is because few understand the true passions of the Fae. While some have tried to spy on Fae Courts, rarely are they seen again. This has helped cultivate the mystique of the Fae for many, keeping people at arm's reach while still wanting to be involved in life altering events of the person's life.

The last few generations, the Fae have found themselves almost entirely against the Soli Empire, seeing them as the ones fostering much of the discord with their fanatic desire to convert and subjugate. A few young Fae and those who grew up in Soli society have been swayed by the Yemanist ways seeing their excitement and love of their faith, however, many Fae have also lost their joy to zealots of Yemanism making the world darker. Fae have found themselves assisting the Erce, the Gethral, the Altyran Dwearn, and even the Mortaeans and Agrineans. No one is sure if the Fae are directing events or simply along for the ride. Often speaking of quests and duties few understand or hear of the Fae seem to have a hand in many major events of the world. Whether seeding the ideas with off handed comments to overtly opposing others to bring them to the forefront, there is usually a Fae somehow involved directly or in directly.

It is rumored the Fae were the ones who brought together the Free People's Alliance by manipulating events to have the delegates who agreed to the alliance into meeting. Most of the Free People's Alliance's major players do have one or more Fae involved with their affairs. Each nation has had Fae approach individuals who would rise to power or guide people in the right direction to fight back against the Yemanist mass conversion. Fae have often spent time among the Erce because of how well they mesh with their naturalist lifestyle. Faun often enjoy the company of the Gethral and their love of freedom, partying, and their people's passion for life. Gnomeran have made a lot of inroads among the Dwearn finding their methods of inventing are of great interest to the Altyr Dwearn. Even Agrineans has seen numerous Lost Fae find their way into their society. When Graewynn formed after the 5th Expansion War, many Fae spread out among the settlements trying to help rebuild. Pyx have been seen anywhere people can be found and while they love mischief, few push their luck so far as to be driven out of villages.

Members of the Courts

Among the Fae, many would like to claim they hold sway; however, each Court seems to have their own way of handling matters of all their members. There are currently four recognized groups of Fae.

The Faun are among the most widely known and spoken of among the Fae. Faun have goat legs from the waist down and have horns sprouting from the tops of their heads, but their upper body otherwise looks Human. Some were confused when Therios started appearing across Anthuli. Therios show more bestial traits across their entire body rather than the distinction of a Faun. Faun are vibrant personalities often commanding attention wherever they go. Valuing celebration, good food and drink, and the company of others, Faun are the life of the party in many cases. In stories, Faun often present their charges with reasons to stay hopeful and appreciate the lives they have lived.

When that sense of wonderment is lost, Faun become vicious, petty, and enjoy watching others suffer. Lost Faun are one of the most overtly cruel of the Lost Fae. The loss of joy for Faun often accompanies being betrayed by those they partied with or stamped on their good time. One isolated incident is not enough to drive a Faun to become Lost, however a series of these incidents can bring a Faun to losing their vibrance. It is not uncommon for a Faun to find themselves the villain of a story to give someone a chance to rise and embrace more heroic aspects or be destroyed in the process. Faun like to prolong their revelry and a Lost Faun will want to drag out the suffering of others rather than give them a quick death.

Almost the opposite of the Faun are the Holminn. Holminn would love nothing better than to stay home and take care of their hearths. Among the Fae, Holminn are the most hospitable. Even the Holminn who decide to travel seek to make others feel at home. Taking care of others is a trait all Holminn have and reliably will try to take care of others through hearty meals and rest. Holminn are connoisseurs of food and drink of all kinds. More adventurous Holminn have gone out into the world to find diverse and interesting food, drink, and practices to make their guests feel at home. A majority of Holminn are more interested in taking care of the homes they create just so they can provide a space for visitors.

Lost Holminn fall into one of two categories. The first is the isolationist, rather than open their homes or hearts to others, these Holminn would rather be left alone and remain alone. For them, their guests have betrayed them too many times for them to be able to trust anyone. These Holminn have extravagant lovely homes but do it for themselves rather than anyone else. The loneliness they feel is profound, but their fear of betrayal keeps them away from others. The other type of Lost Holminn are vagabonds. Losing their hearth is the fastest way for a Holminn to lose their innocence. Whether taken by bandits, war, or natural disaster, losing their home is a Holminn's worst nightmare. Vagabond Lost Holminn are reckless, uncaring about others, and loath to make any types of attachments. The life of a Lost Holminn is unfortunately short and ends miserably because the Holminn does not care to take care of themselves or others.

Gnomeran are a bizarre subgroup of the Fae. They are relentlessly curious, always wanting to get into something new. Many turn to inventing or creating things to satisfy their curiosity. Looking for new and interesting ways to create things or experimenting to find new things are the bread and butter of most Gnomeran. Even those not creatively inclined have a ruthless curiosity sticking their noses into anything and everything. Gnomeran are endlessly fascinated with the world. The focus of their curiosity varies from Gnomeran to Gnomeran, but one thing uniting their entire people is the desire to learn more about the world around them. Some Gnomeran also gravitate toward being explorers, cartographers, and seekers of lost knowledge.

When a Gnomeran loses their sense of excitement for the world, their methods become twisted. Lost Gnomeran are described as unhinged, looking into the taboo, the dangerous, or the macabre. Finding nothing sacred, Lost Gnomeran are dangerous at best and a serious threat at worst. Seeking patrons to fund their bizarre experiments, Lost Gnomeran can become attached to dangerous individuals and increase the threat they represent. Whether crafting weapons, monsters, or worming their way into the circles of their perceived enemies, Lost Gnomeran become a ticking time bomb waiting to explode.

Finally, the Pyx represent the mischievous nature of the Fae. Pyx enjoy playing pranks on others to teach them lessons. Few things bring joy to a Pyx than the confused look on another person's face when they realize they have been pranked. Many Pyx, like Faun, are the life of the party, but will happily excuse themselves to plan their next mischief. Possessing a cleverness beyond most others, the Pyx view the world as an endless teaching moment. Despite their love of pranks, many Pyx do try to do things which will encourage or teach others in a positive way. Joyful Pyx do not want to make their targets suffer, instead they want to make others realize things they are missing in a way which should feel like a revelation.

On the other hand, Lost Pyx teach lessons in a painful and unpleasant way, though their pranks lack a meaning or have a highly convoluted meaning. For a Lost Pyx the meaning is less important but rather the target suffers for their ignorance. There's a vindictive streak in Lost Pyx many have come to fear. Without a sense of wonderment, Pyx are simply cruel to others in backhanded ways. Lost Pyx are pleasant and sweet to others but behind the backs of others plot their demise. Without their innocence Pyx are mean spirited but hide it behind a veneer of kindness.

Regardless of the subgroup of Fae, becoming Lost is not something taken lightly. Viewed as a tragedy among the Fae, becoming Lost is combated by immersing themselves in the things they love to keep their sense of wonderment fresh and strong. No Fae wants to become Lost; it is an unfortunate side effect of the world taking its toll on the psyche of individual Fae. While it is possible to no longer be Lost, many Fae who succumb to the negativity of the world struggle to find their way back. When a Fae finds their joy again, they desperately hold onto it to ensure they do not become Lost again.

Culture

Among the Joyful Fae, life is wonderment, exciting, and a sense of awe of all things around them. Most Joyful Fae are highly focused on the present and are quick to forget minor insult and quick to forgive. Many Fae are quick help others hoping to inspire them with simple shows of kindness and care. Experiencing new things is a source of joy for many Fae. Fae are fascinated by people and endless amused by the things they do. It is common to see smiling Fae watch people almost like a proud older sibling when things are working for the betterment of all.

In truth most Joyful Fae simply want everyone to get along and embrace life the way they have. On average the Fae want to be among people and helping them however they can. Some other species are initially suspicious of Fae for this, simply because they expect some ulterior motive. However, many Joyful Fae simply want to be helpful to others.

However, even the patient and forgiving Joyful Fae have limits. After repeatedly seeing people be cruel and callous towards each other, Fae begins to feel their excitement wane. There is a point just prior to becoming Lost in which the Fae simply feels numb which can be confused for depression but is a much more significant warning sign. A Fae in this state is walking the razors edge between remaining Joyful or becoming Lost. This is commonly known as "Walking the Mists". Wise Fae will intervene and do anything they can to prevent the Fae from becoming Lost. Even Joyless Fae have been known to intervene not wishing another to fall into the same pit they have.

Lost Fae are the dark reflection of Joyful Fae. To the Lost, the world is a miserable, hateful place. Every action, word, and image is filled with deception, treachery, or ulterior motive. Others are liars, monsters, and murderers in the eyes of the Lost. Whether its envy of happy moments, disgust at others for past misdeeds, or just disdain for other people, Lost Fae are generally not pleasant to be around. However, many do agree misery loves company. It is not uncommon for Lost Fae to congregate amongst each other and bond over their mutual dislike of others. Aushenai, Mortaeans, and even Ork'rus also find common ground with Lost Fae.

In the minds of many Lost Fae, it is only fair others share in their misery. In turn, they pit themselves against others to share the pain deep in their souls. However, even Lost Fae draw the line at certain things even to dark for them. Joyful Fae insist this is the shred of joy still inside each Lost which can be nurtured and brought back. Regaining their Joy is often a long and involved process requiring others with a great deal of patience and a willingness to help the Lost deal with the traumas which brought them to the place they found themselves.

Music

Fae music and songs evoke powerful emotion, finding a way to touch people. Joyful songs have been said to change the life of people having heard them the first time. There are a few rumors of Fae being the people who originated Spellweaver techniques, and though similar to magic, insist it is somehow connected to the strange powers of Wild Fae.

Lost Fae also have a connection to music, however, their music often is associated with sorrow and pain. Having a wide variety of styles and themes, many are driven to tears hearing the soulful words of Lost Fae music. Other Lost Fae have discordant compositions not truly popular with anyone aside from Lost Fae. These songs often include noises which are not made by instruments but other objects like

nails on a chalkboard or shattering glass which evoke a sense of anxiety in others.

Artwork

Fae Artwork is often highly expressive, capturing a moment in time as if they dreamed it up and gave it form. Much of Fae artwork is obscured in abstract concepts. Many critics who have deciphered Fae artwork describe a story based on the symbols and shapes of the work. Taking a page from more absurdist styles, some characterize Fae artwork as complex so the average viewer may not quite understand what they are looking at.

Clothing

Fae love flamboyant outfits often with shiny accessories. This helps add to their mystique when the Fae seemingly appear out of nowhere and offer a bit of advice or aid. Many nobles have turned to Fae designers to make clothing for them for galas and ceremonies. The elaborate designs the Fae wear themselves impress others because the work the Fae put into each of these outfits is exceptional and detailed. While not all Fae are necessarily fashion connoisseurs, they do enjoy adding small flourishes to their clothing, equipment, and homes to give a sense of style.

On the flip side, many Lost Fae prefer more subdued color choices, but are no less obsessed with having Avant Garde styles or overly dramatic outfits. If the colors are not eye catching, the style commonly will grab the attention of others. Some fashionistas joke the reason Lost Fae fashion exists is because the tailor or seamstress got tired of making alterations and lost their joy.

Language

Though Fae speak languages of the area they are in with some time, many Fae prefer language which uses double meanings, innuendo, and has several ways to explain the same concept. This helps them keep their words colorful and each one is carefully chosen for the moment, even when an excited Fae may chatter another person's ear off. This helps them give others' ideas or seed thoughts in the minds of others without being too overt.

Hierarchy

Most Fae pay little regard to titles or ranking, except within a Fae Court. Generally, a Court will have a Courtspeaker who is to be heard and heeded. Courtspeakers are generally an elder wise Fae who has proven they can lead, but also can make decisions even with little information. Courtspeakers may appoint others to perform specific duties as necessary for the needs of the local Court. Most Courtspeakers are wise enough to know when it is time to pass on the title to a successor, though some young Fae may request a vote of no confidence and if at least three out of four Fae agree, then the Courtspeaker must step down and a new one chosen.

There is a distinction between a mortal Fae Court and a Wild Fae Court. Each deals within events within their

realms separately, but it is not uncommon for mortal Fae Courts to seek patronage from a Wild Fae Court for protection.

Military

Fae rarely participate in militaries, however, when they do, they often seek support roles rather than being a frontline fighter. Improving morale, cooking for the camp, healing wounds, or serving as advisors are common places one may find a Fae in an army.

Heraldry

Fae generally adopt the banners and symbols of their homes and those they follow. Most Fae are content to not announce their presence unless they are following a Wild Fae Regent.

What few Regents bother with Heraldry are often unmistakable. Some have called the few Fae banners anyone knows to be foolish or silly, however, the Regent the banner represents often has their own reasons for their choices and are loath to explain it.

Mortaeans

Average Mortaeon Lifespan: Unknown

Maximum Mortaeon Lifespan: Believed unable to die of old age.

Undead creatures have walked the wilds of Anthuli for as long as anyone can remember. For many kingdoms, undead creatures were like the weather, occasionally a herd of them would build up and become a problem for a small village but rarely were they a true threat to the safety of any kingdom. However much of this changed one year after the beginning of the Fourth Expansion War. The Soli's efforts had pushed their borders into the Kingdom of Agrineas in the southern part of Anthuli. Agrineas was a relatively peaceful and prosperous kingdom who had maintained their peaceful neutrality among neighboring nations for several generations. Their ideals initially seemed in line with much of what the Yemanist missionaries had to say and within about two years the entire kingdom had been converted. To celebrate reaching the southern shores of Anthuli, the Soli wished to build a new city to serve as their new beachhead in their efforts to convert the entire continent.

Digging Their Own Grave

Construction began while the Fourth Expansion War broke out. Due to logistical issues, much of the labor needed to be supplied by the Agrineans. A particularly zealous Yemanist Cleric by the name of Monzori Hektram had been appointed Provincial Governor. Many felt he was put in charge of the project due to his fanatical faith in Yemanism, but some rumors have circulated it was because many people wanted him out of the Soli homeland for a variety of reasons. Hektram felt no act was punishable so long as it was done in the name of Celestia. Almost immediately he was disgusted by the slow progress of building an entire city. Driving his followers to find more workers, Hektram demanded more and more of his workers until many began to resent him and Yemanism because of it. Hektram used threats of the armies of Soli intervening or eternal damnation to keep the Agrineans in line. Continuing to demand more workers, Hektram sent his forces to the neighboring nation of Ercen to find workers. The Ercen preferred a more naturalist lifestyle and refused to help the Soli to build what they felt was an eyesore. Infuriated by their refusal to aid in Hektram's work, he ordered his soldiers to take prisoners. In Hektram's mind, heathens were not people and did not have to be treated as such.

Within a year, hundreds of Agrineans, Ercen, and Verdanti worked like slaves underneath the cruel purview of Hektram and his loyal followers. Conditions worsened the longer Hektram remained in power. Several of his own lieutenants tried to reason with him this was wrong, but Hektram refused to listen. Those who questioned his sanity, even Soli, ended up in chains or put to work alongside the others. Rumors Hektram had gone mad circulated among the Agrineans, some began writing letters to appeal to the nearby Yemanist Clergy to intervene. In his madness, Hektram had agents intercepting such messages so little to

no word got out about the dealings in Agrinea unless he wished it so. An Ercen shaman who quietly practiced Harmonious magic had been secretly tending to the ill, the wounded, and the dying, trying to bring some relief to the many people who were treated like animals. In time even the Shaman's faith began to dwindle, until one dark day when a spirit appeared to the Shaman in a dream. The spirit promised an end to this madness and warned there was a great sanctification ritual which needed to be tampered with otherwise the Soli would claim those lands for a thousand years. Between how the Soli were represented by how Hektram treated people, and a desperate desire for peace, the Shaman agreed to do as the spirit asked.

In the Grand Plaza of Celestia, at the center of the new city, Hektram and dozens of Yemanist clergy had gathered to perform a Grand Ritual called the Solace of El'Yemana Created by Hektram and his most fanatical followers, the Ritual was rumored to bind every soul in the nation to El'Yemana eternally. While this Ritual sounded peaceful, the spirit who tempted the Shaman told them it would steal souls away from their final rest and would be taken by El'Yemana. By this time many Agrineans and Ercen had been preparing for a revolt; they just required a spark to make it happen. That spark was found in the Shaman, who was desperate to ensure the Ercen would not be chained to a deity they did not believe in. The Shaman's words ignited the powder keg and soon there was fighting throughout the streets. During the commotion, the Solace of El'Yemana was interrupted and a catastrophic backlash leveled the Grand Plaza and sent a shockwave of chaotic energy out across the city and much of the lands beyond.

Approximately two thirds of the living souls caught in the blast wave were immediately killed, however, they did not pass on as the Ritual had intended. Instead, their souls were anchored to this world, unable to pass beyond. Many who were not killed saw their families killed and rise as undead, but still retained their sentience and were as shocked and horrified as their living relatives. Further, the blast wave caused earthquakes and cracks to appear across Agrineas. Soon rivers and even the sea began to flood portions of the country leaving it a swampy land of death and misery. It took time for the survivors to come to grips with what had happened to them. Former Soli and Ercen tried to return to their peoples but were driven off just like any other undead thing. They were called unclean, monster, and forsaken. Seeing the devastation of the region, Soli forces worked to seal the entire area off as strategically worthless.

Rising from Ruin

Whether because of the Ritual or the presence of so many who could not pass on, across the continent people began encountering more mindless undead. This led to the Soli beginning work on the Wall of Sacraments. Stretching from the western side of the continent, it went for hundreds of miles. This wall originally had been meant as a base for the siege equipment to turn back the giant animated trees used by the Ercen, but soon found a second use in holding back

the many undead which began to wander in from both the Ercen lands and the cursed lands of Agrineas. During this time many Mortaeans used the cover of the hordes to escape Agrineas and explore the world beyond their borders. Despite being exiled, many Mortaeans simply wished to escape the dreary and harsh kingdom they now lived within.

Over the next generation, the people, transformed by the disaster and not, came together. It is said Hektram was captured and was punished in the cruelest of ways for his crimes against the Agrineans, the Ercen, and even the Soli. As word spread about the disaster, the Yemanist clergy used the event to strike fear into the hearts of converts saying even a pious priest could be corrupted by darkness and redoubled their conversion efforts. For that silent generation, Agrineas was forgotten, believed to have been wiped clean from the world.

Instead, the survivors banded together to form their own people. In time the sentient undead called themselves the Mortaeans. Enraged at how they had been treated, they embraced their deathless state in hopes of finding some way of coping with what they had become. After the Fourth Expansion War, the Mortaeans began venturing back out into the world. Still feared and reviled for their existence, many Mortaeans fled back to their ruined home.

After their transformation, many former Agrineans, Ercen, and Soli turned Agrineas into a kingdom of survival of the fittest. Survival was paramount and the weak rarely lived long enough to escape the undead stalking the lands. However, during this time a bastardized version of the Solace of El'Yemana was created to transform living creatures into Mortaeans. Serving as the lifeblood of this dark kingdom, many would create a family and to escape aging, would offer themselves up to become Mortaeans. This has become a controversial topic even among Mortaeans because there are those among them who require the flesh, blood or bone of the living to survive. It is a common punishment in Agrineas to be thrown to starving Mortaeans.

Hidden Among the Dead

Mortaeans learned many of them could blend in among the mindless undead and move among them unarmed. This led to those willing to assist their living countrymen by finding supplies, working the fields, or even scavenging what sites they could find. The progress of rebuilding has been slow, however, those who have retained some semblance of themselves have banded together because no one else will help them.

Most of the large towns in Agrineas have been overrun by the dead and are so thickly clogged with walking corpses, even the Mortaeans who can blend in among them get uneasy. However, the few who have been willing to venture into the cities have spread rumors that something seems to be happening in the cities. Dubbed Necropoli because of the unusual attraction of undead, the Mortaeans explorers have seen figures moving among the dead as if on a

mission. There are also reports of strange witch lights in windows or seen in the distance as you get deeper into the city.

Whatever the witch lights are, anyone caught directly beneath them has found the undead will turn on even those who can normally move among them. This has many Agrineans and Mortaeans concerned over what it could mean and who may be operating out of the Necropoli.

During the 5th Expansion War

Though the Fronii Order and the Wall of Sacraments kept much of Agrineas contained, there were a few places where Mortaeans could sneak beyond the wall. Using hordes of undead as cover, some scaled or even burrowed under the Wall to escape their cursed land. Those escaping often sought out allies for Agrineas or simply to start a new existence somewhere not swarming with undead. However, not all Mortaeans wanted to leave Agrineas for mundane reasons.

During the events of the Fifth Expansion War, there was a mass outbreak of undead from the many bloody battlefields. Some reports say creatures were seen skulking among the corpses left behind, possibly raising them to create the hordes of mindless undead which began to rampage, attacking anyone in their path. There are Mortaeans who believe some of their countryfolk may have escaped to sow chaos and discord during the War.

While more and more Mortaeans sought a way to escape the Wall of Sacraments, a few bore witness to the first test of the Exorcist. Those not caught in the effect witnessed thousands of undead simply crumble to dust after a blinding flash of light. Horrified by this weapon, the Mortaeans knew they would need to find allies beyond the Wall to assist them before the Soli wiped them out.

After the 5th Expansion War

With the power vacuum of Graewynn's formation, many Mortaeans have spread out across Graewynn. Some simply seek a normal life among other people less obsessed with death, others to loot and pillage for Agrae, and worse yet, some to feed on the living.

In time, some communities became so desperate, they offered Mortaeans money and shelter to protect them from bandits, the wandering monsters left behind after the war, and even other Mortaeans. Though relatively few in number compared to the other species, Mortaeans are remarkably hardy, only beaten by the Effigies. Many villages and towns have taken to hiring the Mortaeans for their natural resilience, even going so far as to allow Mortaeans who require flesh and blood to sustain themselves to feast on anyone who would try to raid or attack towns. Some of the more isolated towns even use feeding criminals to Mortaeans as capital punishment.

Many Mortaeans are searching for a place and purpose in their unlife. Each Mortaeans is a unique case and they run

the gambit of those who just desire peace and tranquility, to those who have made it their mission to transform all living creatures into Mortaeans.

The Thanology of the Mortaeans

At present, five types of Mortaeans have been identified. While it is unknown what kind of Mortaeans will rise when the Thanatosis Ritual is completed, many wonder if there may be other types which could rise but are rare. Mortaeans bodies do not work like most other creatures of the world. Whatever power animates them, they cannot starve, do not require breathing, or for their heart to beat. As such, many Mortaeans feel a creeping numbness to the world both physically and emotionally.

Without a heartbeat to let them know when they feel something, many have come to look at emotions with a level of detachment. While they understand emotions, and can remember them from when they were alive, most emotions do not have nearly as strong a hold on the psyche of a Mortaeans. Ruthlessness and cold indifference are common traits among Mortaeans for this reason. Some Mortaeans find themselves with a need to feed on the living to sustain themselves. It is unclear why some must sustain themselves this way while others do not. Even stranger still is Mortaeans can eat and appreciate food and drink, but it is not required for them to remain existing.

One disturbing thing people have noticed, Mortaeans do not just rise in Agrineas, since the Folly any time a person dies and comes back as undead, there is a small chance they will return as a Mortaeans. No one is quite sure what factors cause this; however, it is noted areas with higher Entropy seem to have some connection to the rise of undead and Mortaeans. There have been reports of Mortaeans rising in the Deamonwake after Hektram's Folly

First are the Alabaster Mortaeans. While the most normal looking of Mortaeans, the Alabaster are known for their hypnotic gaze and ability to work their way into positions of power. Named for the paling or ashen pallor their skin takes, many Alabasters do not show other signs of death unless closely inspected. Over the years Alabaster Mortaeans were among the first Mortaeans to go out into the world and speak for their people. Some villages have become wary of pallid strangers because of horror stories of a Mortaeans infiltrating peaceful villages only to feast on the villagers.

Next are the Decayed. These Mortaeans may have started off looking like Alabaster Mortaeans, but found their flesh began to rot, wounds did not visibly heal, but over time no longer hindered them. The Decayed are often compared to zombies and can be difficult to distinguish between them. Decayed show incredible endurance in the face of many extremes. Whether through some quirk of their Thanatosis, or dark design, some Decayed even swell with an unnatural bulk making them more resilient against harm. It is not uncommon for Decayed to hide among zombies to either steer herds of them or simply use them as a cover to travel from place to place. Despite their frightful appearance,

many Decayed have been known to make light of their form for entertainment or even use it as a means of protecting people.

The Desiccated are an unusual lot, many of them are skeletal in nature, finding their bodies withering as if dried out into tough leathery hide revealing the bones beneath the skin. It is unknown why but the process of Thanatosis may also swell the bones of their body in unnatural ways making them appear to have a variety of body shapes despite being mostly just skin and bone. While many Desiccated appear fragile, they are remarkably durable for their species. Arrows and even guns do little to them and some Desiccated have even learned the secrets of encapsulating their souls to help them avoid a final destruction.

Regarded as the least fortunate of the Mortaeans are Ghouls. Ghouls are warped and twisted into fearsome beastlike creatures with an appetite for the living. All Ghouls have a gnawing hunger inside them requiring them to devour living creatures to sustain their existence. Some Ghouls do their best to feast only on animals they can hunt, but sentient life is a delicacy to a Ghoul's palette. Often used as shock troops or hunters, Ghouls struggle to keep a hold of their hunger and can fly into a terrifying rage ripping and tearing through anything in their path. This lack of control is viewed by other Mortaeans as dangerous, but ultimately useful if directed properly.

Finally, the most bizarre among the Mortaeans are the Ghosts. When Thanatosis occurs, it is possible for the body to turn to ash leaving behind an animated set of clothing or armor. Ghosts must anchor themselves to a physical form otherwise they experience harrowing screams of the damned. The best way to silence these screams is by animating clothing and armor to maintain a vaguely humanoid shape. While Ghosts have tried to possess other forms, it never goes well, and they are forced to return to their humanoid shape. Damaging the possessed parts of a Ghost weakens their hold over time and soon the screams begin echoing in their minds. Some believe this to be an attempt by the psyche to hold onto some semblance of self rather than be pulled into whatever comes after life.

Culture

Mortaeans culture has become one of survival, timelessness, and learning to deal with impossible situations. Most Mortaeans have a muted sense of emotions because they do not feel the physical stimuli associated with emotion such as a rapid heartbeat when afraid. Mortaeans remember the concepts of emotions from their lives, however, they feel far less impactful now than before. Some have compared it to understanding the concept of emotions but lacking the ability to truly feel them.

There are those who have embraced their undead state and revel in it. This has led to hunts of the living, seeing how much damage their deathless forms can take before collapsing, or even comparing the taste of different types of blood, flesh, or bone. The one stimuli Mortaeans get a rush

from its taste, most things simply taste like ash, however the blood, flesh, and bone of the living are like eating gourmet meals each time they succumb to their feeding urges.

Music

Mortaeans have come to find they appreciate the same music they did in life, though some Mortaeans composers have taken to composing dirges and dark melodies to truly express how they feel about their current state in the world. Only those who look kindly on the macabre seem to appreciate this new style of gothic music.

Artwork

Mortaeans have come to appreciate artwork far more than expected. However, at times their mediums are questionable. Many Mortaeans have taken to using bits of both the dead and the living in their work. To them, these macabre creations speak to a sense of beauty they have found in their deathless state.

Much of Mortaeans artwork adopts harsh forms or shocking images. Some believe this is an attempt to reconcile their existence and the world around them even if others may shy away from it or view it with disgust.

Clothing

The fashion of many Mortaeans commonly mimics their preferences from their life, but as time goes on, some find those styles have begun to fade and adopt new styles. With the focus on survival, even the Mortaeans have taken to wearing what will help them survive better even if it will become stained from their unhealing wounds, or not quite sit right as their form rots and twists.

Several Alabaster have teamed up to create a new fashion among Mortaeans focusing on making funerary garb more fashionable. Veils, dark colors, high collars, and billowing cloaks have all cycled back into style in Agrineas among fashion-conscious Mortaeans. Darker colors and reds typically are used to hide any stains from their wounds or other less pleasant bodily secretions.

Language

Mortaeans speak the same languages they did in life, and commonly use Tradespeak over most other languages. Oddly enough, something about their undead condition makes it hard for them to pick up new languages. Scholars believe it has something to do with the static nature of their existence. While they can learn new skills easily enough, language is one many struggle with once they awaken from death.

Hierarchy

Most Mortaeans are used to doing what is necessary to survive. Many find it difficult to follow anyone who has not dealt with Mortaeans and their unique needs or makes choices which may go against their personal survival. To many Mortaeans preserving their own existence supersedes any hierarchy.

Military

While there is no formal Mortaeans army, many of the deathless have discovered how to herd mindless undead and have used them to launch assaults on the Wall of Sacraments or even Erce and Altyr. Outside of Agrineas, many Mortaeans have little issue fighting on the front line as they can withstand more than the average living creature. Wounds and disease are minor concerns at best when they can be impaled and only be a minor inconvenience.

There is a growing movement among the Mortaeans to create a fighting force to combat the Soli's constructs. While not as physically powerful, Mortaeans are clever enough to change tactics on constructs and potentially dance around them. If a mistake is made, the situation is slightly more forgiving for a Mortaeans than it would be for others. While this is still in its nascent stages, if organized and used alongside the herding of Undead, it could prove to be a dangerous fighting force come the 6th Expansion War.

Heraldry

With the chaos after Hektram's Folly, few Mortaeans care enough to bother using symbols or heraldry unless they are forced to deal with those outside Agrineas. Most Mortaeans who do adopt a heraldry of their own tend towards symbols to provoke fear, unease, or terror in their foes.

Ork'rus

Average Ork'rus Lifespan: 25 years

Maximum Ork'rus Lifespan: 75 years

Claiming to be one of the oldest species, few have the courage to challenge the Ork'rus's claim. However, this is mildly misleading because the Ork'rus have only existed for about 700 years as they currently are. Before that the Ork'rus were demonic spirits who hunted people for sport and found pleasure in destruction. However, that all changed because of the reckless behavior of demons bound them into another world.

As a note, the average Ork'rus lifespan is so low due to a high mortality rate in young Ork'rus eager to fight and prove themselves.

In the Mists of the Past

During the days when the Aelf'enai lived among the clouds and the Dwearn were still carving their kingdoms into the mountains, the predecessors of the Ork'rus roamed the lands freely. Demons, creatures born of the darkest aspects of existence, roamed the land feeding on those who they could capture. Many of these demonic creatures were made almost entirely of magic only solidifying to hunt and prey on souls. If the storytellers among the Ork'rus are to be believed, the lands of those days lived in fear of the world beyond their borders and scraped by huddling together to hold back the worst of the demonic beings prowling just beyond the circles of light they scraped together. Ork'rus often joke the reason the Dwearn sought out the mountains and the Aelf'enai took to the sky was to escape the clutches of the creatures of the night.

In those days the demons fed on souls of mortals to gain power. Stories suggest some demons grew so powerful they rivaled the deities. The only reason the demons did not devour the world is that many of them were greedy, territorial, and fought amongst themselves too much to be more than a threat to the weak. Yet as time went on and the other species grew, the ancestors of the Ork'rus began to be pushed back as brave folks pushed back against the unknown. As the supply of souls began to dwindle, many demons began feeding on each other as much as on what souls they could find.

One of the most powerful demons foresaw this would lead to the end of their kind. This being began gathering other demons and forming a horde of gnashing teeth, cruelty, and horror. Many demonic creatures refused to join this horde, even as it grew in strength to topple towns and villages on its own. A choice was given, join and reap what souls they could, or become their next meal. While the demon population shrank, other species began to expand and grow. Many thought the demons had disappeared, but rather something worse was building. Once the horde had grown to sufficient size, it began to sweep across the land conquering rather than hunting. Instead of glutting themselves on every soul they could, they enslaved the mortals the horde came across and fed on them, sipping at

their souls and slowly draining them of everything vital about the person. This slow drain left the unfortunate people trapped within the lands claimed by this evil as husks of who they once were.

For a time, the demonic hordes spread unchecked across Abriketh. The stories tell of a continent to the east of Anthuli where the horde had started, and the horrors which transpired there. A tendril of this monstrous gathering even spread to the eastern shores of Anthuli for a time. There the kingdoms toppled one after another until the demons halted their conquest to revel in the spoils in an area which became known as the Narseth Wastes. The people they enslaved would one day become the Gethral after the shackles were broken and they drove out their captors. However, this was only made possible by the brave acts of an Aelf'enai across the sea who sabotaged the Ritual of Transublimation.

The Ritual of Transublimation

While the details of the Ritual are lost to time, historians have pieced together the Ork'rus had intended to draw out the power of whatever had given the Aelf'enai their immortality and power with magic after Ishalinoria crashed into the Dwearn's Hymspyd. There is speculation the Ritual may have helped the taint of demonic power spread across the lands and make the hordes nigh invincible. However, the Ritual was incredibly complex requiring dozens of Ritualists to perform it and priceless components to be used to shift the power from whatever shell it resided in and empowered the Aelf'enai. As the legend goes, one Aushenai sabotaged the ritual which caused creatures of spirit across the world to begin to vanish into the Spirit World. The power did not wash across the world like a storm, but instead swelled outward slowly more like a whirlpool sucking ships to the deeps. Many powerful overlords were drawn in almost immediately because they were present to oversee the Ritual. One Overlord not present sought out a solution to being imprisoned in the Spirit World cut off from their favored source of sustenance.

No one is quite sure what was done, or how it was accomplished, but a solution was found. Giving up much of their demonic essence, the survivors of the Ritual were left in entirely mortal bodies roughly constructed in haste leaving them mortal and more vulnerable than any had ever known. This was the birth of what most of the world now knows as the Ork'rus.

The Great Trial

Across the sea, the demonic forces occupying the east of Anthuli had no warning of the impending imprisonment creeping across the ocean. They were embroiled in a war against their former slaves who had risen under the leadership of a slave by the name of Merrax. Having grown fat and complacent from decades of leisure and torment, the demons were caught between the fury of a people united against them and a whirlpool of magic tearing them out of this reality and leaving them elsewhere. Meanwhile, the survivors of the horde's crumbling empire were now

forced to eat like other mortals, find shelter, and make their own way in the world.

They soon found themselves being hunted by other species they had once conquered. Many Ork'rus quickly learned they had far more limits than they once did. Many fled to rebuild and decide how they would be a part of the world now they were so vulnerable. For an untold amount of time the Ork'rus disappeared into the harshest wildernesses to discover this new way.

Many Ork'rus did not fair well initially and even though they had escaped being sucked into the Spirit World, they did not know how to contend with having so many limits. The first generation of Ork'rus, those who had once been demons took many risks which mortals would not. Even death was a new experience for most of them. Many expected their fallen to reform and be fine, however, when they did not and their form rotted, the Ork'rus had a earthshattering realization, they no longer understood the rules of the world, everything had changed.

This ended poorly for them until they discovered they could reproduce. Demons did not require procreation; new demons could be created through breaking down the essence of souls and shaping the raw soul stuff into a demon. Most Ork'rus had no idea how to reproduce or what it meant to be pregnant. The Ritual they used was rushed and though they modeled their forms after humans, not all the details were quite the same. For one they had varying shades of green skin rather than human skin tones, many had come through with tusks or fangs, and semi pointed ears.

When the first new Ork'rus was born, the Ork'rus did not know what to expect. Some stories say the Ork'rus kidnapped a young mother to teach their people how to care for and raise a child. Though the human's name is lost to time, it did spark a massive cultural shift in how the Ork'rus saw the world. The first generation of Ork'rus took to procreating quickly because they knew if they did not, most of them would be gone. Aging was another frightening new concept for the Ork'rus. Even though they had given up much of what makes up a demon's essence, they still had much of the raw emotion and rage they had from before Transublimation. Ork'rus mortality rates spiked as groupings of Ork'rus argued over how to do things. Much of this fell on the new generation of Ork'rus who were more cautious having to grow up rather than simply be shaped into existence.

Returning to the World

After a few generations, they hesitantly began to explore the world. With all of the original Ork'rus now gone, the eldest Ork'rus told stories of what they once were, but many of the newer generations did not believe these stories and sought adventure and exploration. Having grown up in difficult wilderness, many Ork'rus were tough fighters more than capable of handling their own.

After seeing what other nations and peoples had, many Ork'rus fell into banditry and raiding to bring supplies back to their people. As other nations rallied to respond to these attacks, soon the Greenskin Conflict began. While not classified as a war, it was a time where many border villages worried about green skinned invaders coming to kill and steal from them. Many of the nations at the time were at war with each other so the Greenskin Conflict was merely a irritation rather than a true threat. It was not until a Dagani noble sent a messenger to a Ork'rus camp offering to provide them with supplies, if the Ork'rus would fight for the noble. Confused at first, the Ork'rus simply killed the messenger and took the payment. A second messenger was sent a month later with guards this time. After grasping what the messenger wanted, the Ork'rus agreed, knowing they would get even more and could still fight.

After a few very successful engagements, Ork'rus across Anthuli were being propositioned as mercenaries to fight for human kingdoms. Though it took many years before any Human kingdom would allow the Ork'rus to settle among them. In time the Ork'rus demanded settlement rights as part of their mercenary contracts. So long as they were given steady work, their neighbors learned Ork'rus could be helpful with their surprising strength and ingenuity from many hard years surviving on little. While it may have taken nearly two hundred years, the Ork'rus became a common site in many kingdoms of Anthuli.

When not hired out as mercenaries, many Ork'rus worked as laborers, and trackers to people who did not know of their ancestor's transgressions. In time, the Ork'rus spread out, seeking new places to live away from the harsh lands they had once called home. Time seemed to heal many wounds, but in nearly every Ork'rus encampment, there are still whispers of the old days and what they once were. Many use these tales to scare young Ork'rus, though a few delusional Ork'rus wonder if staying in the mortal world had been worth the difficulties they endured.

Today, Ork'rus have traveled and settled across the world. Many are still fierce warriors often seeking out battles to set their blood alight while others maintain their encampments. Some kingdoms allowed the Ork'rus to remain within their borders knowing the Ork'rus could be useful allies if needed. Common folk often feared the Ork'rus because many of them had short tempers which led them to conflicts. As time went on however, many Ork'rus began to move beyond their baser instincts and even became merchants, artists, bards, or crafters. Civilization seemed to help cool the Ork'rus temper and bring them a measure of purpose outside just survival.

The Rise of the Soli

By the time the Soli had left their Homeland for the first time Ork'rus had established themselves as an equal member of the species living across Anthuli. A joke from around this time was if an Ork'rus camp started getting restless and agitated, then war was coming. Some insisted Ork'rus were able to sense when war was coming. Though some Ork'rus still operated as bandits they were viewed no different than

the average bandit.

There is a famous Soli story about one of the early Missionary caravans carrying many precious metals as gifts for converts which was beset by bandits. The story tells of the Ork'rus and their strength often to scare young Yemanists into behaving. Though initially painted as monsters, the Soli soon learned the Ork'rus were just like any other species they encountered outside of Sol.

Since then, the Soli have adopted a somewhat strange outlook on Ork'rus despite what many might have guessed. Soli missionaries claim it is a point of pride to convert an Ork'rus to Yemanism. Among the worshipers of El'Yemana helping an Ork'rus on the road to enlightenment is considered a great achievement as so few Ork'rus convert.

During the Expansion Wars, many Soli fought with Ork'rus hired by kingdoms arrayed against the spread of Yemanism. Most Ork'rus were happy to take the spoils of the mercenary work and have a chance to fight against the array of forces the Soli gathered. Despite their history, the Gethral have begrudgingly accepted the Ork'rus as allies in their fight against the Soli. Partly out of a need for every warrior they can get and seeking to let go of past hatred to build a better future.

At present, most Ork'rus encampments have been set up in Graewynn region, owing no fealty to any group beside the members of their encampments. Many villages and towns have taken to hiring Ork'rus to protect them from bandits or beasts roaming the wilds. Happy to have the trade and freedom to do business within many towns, the Ork'rus have found a level of freedom and acceptance unlike any generation before them. Many have proven themselves to be honorable and capable in the eyes of people who may have feared them. Ork'rus are usually considered rough around the edges but are welcome in most places across Graewynn.

Descendants of Demons

The Ork'rus are composed of five distinctive types each with their own quirks. The Ork'rus have body types which run the entire gambit of short to tall, lanky to muscular, and everything in between. One common unifying quality for the Ork'rus is their skin tone is some shade of green. Ork'rus often wear their scars as a badge of honor to show they have survived many battles and difficult trials, most of which they choose to undergo.

Some stories suggest the various types of Ork'rus seen today descended from certain types of demonic creatures. Smallest in stature among the hordes are the Goblins, however, they are the most common type of Ork'rus. Believed to have once been Imps, Goblins are the least physically imposing of all the Ork'rus, but they make up for it with a cunning swiftness, mischievousness, and often reckless behavior. Imps are a type of demon known for being numerous and using overwhelming numbers to bring down larger prey. One terrifying quality of Imps is when their physical form is destroyed, it releases a blast of fire.

More than one hero of those days discovered killing even a single Imp could create a chain reaction leaving little more than a blast crater.

Quick-witted and usually able to adapt to any kind of environment, Goblins have found ways to live even among their larger cousins by making themselves indispensable to whoever is in charge. Using quick thinking, a bit of impulse, and an instinct to survive, Goblins always have an exit strategy if things do not look good for them. Only Goblins clever enough to evade being blamed for things or know when to flee from a fight live to become elders. Clever Goblins often will happily do whatever they can to survive, even learning to halt themselves when whipped into a frenzy.

Hobgoblins are a bit of a misnomer, while they are accepted as Ork'rus, instead of descending from demons, Hobgoblins were once Aelf'enai which gave into the pressure put on them by the demons to become one of them. Whatever dark magic was used; Hobgoblins now exist as their own species. Slightly larger than normal Goblins, Hobgoblins are also typically lanky, but are smarter than the average goblin. Having a knack for using what is at hand, Hobgoblins often find work as crafters among Ork'rus encampments. Retaining some of the cleverness of their Aelf'enai heritage, Hobgoblins are usually tasked with making plans, organizing, and maintaining the supplies of an encampment. Some Ork'rus claim Hobgoblins are not true Ork'rus, but few would rather do without the skills many Hobgoblins possess.

Orks descended from a type of demon known only as a Fury. Furies are regarded as demonic foot soldiers and are driven by an intense bloodlust. Their original forms are amalgamations of flesh and metal, and they use weapons that look crudely made, but are nevertheless devastatingly effective. Their name alludes to a frenzied state Furies enter making them difficult to kill, even in ideal conditions. Some furies even can cause others to suffer from a mindless rage causing disruption and terror in the ranks of their enemies.

Orks usually make up a large part of any Ork'rus encampment. Orks are most found as warriors, guards, or muscle. For an Ork fighting makes all other joys in life pale. While aggressive, Orks are not necessarily foolish. Many have taken to perfecting the art of combat both to survive after the Ritual of Transublimation, and profit when kingdoms need soldiers. Despite their skill at fighting, Orks have worked in any profession one can imagine bringing their aggression with them even if not used to harm others. Even as entertainers, Ork music sounds angry or violent, but the passion of their music cannot be denied. Some other species have come to enjoy Ork music for the sense of energy it provides.

Trolsk descend from Demonic Generals come in many forms making it difficult to know how to deal with them without surviving a fight against them. Utilizing strategy, underhanded tactics, or simply leading their troops in a gory charge, no two demonic generals are the same. The

only traits they share are their keen minds and instinct for breaking an enemy's forces and spirit.

Standing larger than most Orks are the Trolsk. Trolsk gravitate towards professions where they can be seen and heard. Descending from the demonic generals of the horde, Trolsk are known for their immense pride. Tarnishing the pride of a Trolsk is a way to make an enemy for life. Finding ways to express their pride has led Trolsk to make bold moves, often at the risk of themselves or others. Some call Trolsk reckless, but some of the schemes of Trolsk have paid off and won them the day. Looking at most issues like a general would at a battlefield, Trolsk look for efficient ways to do things, even if it requires them to make difficult choices. This cutthroat attitude has proven to be the downfall of many who would oppose the Trolsk in question. Despite their ways, Trolsk do want what is best for their people, but understand at times that means sacrifice.

The final type of demon the Ork'rus have descended from are the monstrous Behemoths. Behemoths while large and imposing, could shatter stone with their fists, tusks, or tails. A rampaging Behemoth is considered one of dangerous things mortals can face. Able to kill in a single strike, Behemoth hide is so thick, few things can pierce it. Coupled with their titanic strength, a single Behemoth can easily level a town. When not employed for war, Behemoths were used as beasts of burden to carry captives back to demonic strongholds. Carrying cages on their backs, many wept as they were carried towards an existence of suffering.

Ettin descend from Behemoths and are the largest of the Ork'rus. While they can no longer break down stone walls with ease, Ettin are easily one of the strongest sentient living creatures. Both tough and dangerous, Ettin make fearsome opponents on the battlefield. Though unlike many other Ork'rus, Ettin do not thirst for battle. Many Ettin are content working for their keep and have a surprisingly strong work ethic. An Ettin would rather get a job done now than put it off until later. More than once, an Ettin has surprised other species with how gentle they can be during peaceful times. However, when an Ettin is roused to anger, they make full use of their strength and shatter their enemies without remorse.

Culture

Ork'rus culture has become a blending of several martial traditions coupled with an attitude problem. Many Ork'rus struggle to stick to the letter of the law and butt heads with others often. Young Ork'rus often prescribe to a might makes right attitude until they end up doing something reckless and if they survive, learn quickly guile and cleverness can beat strength if used correctly.

Ork'rus culture also engages in practices which at times are questionable to other people. Ork'rus tend towards the more violent solutions to their problems because of the demonic blood in their veins. Blood Magic being a key example. While the Ork'rus do not condone Blood Magic as an entire species, some groups of Ork'rus do. Those who may not be fully aware of their history believe it is their

birthright. However, Blood Magic existed long before the Ork'rus existed. Many Ork'rus will solve an argument by beating each other bloody only to laugh about it later and seem to have forgotten what they were arguing about.

Similarly, only a small portion of the Ork'rus species brags about being descended from demonic creatures. Many in fact avoid bringing it up to prevent others from viewing them with mistrust or fear. Common folk often are unable to understand the difference and there have been several times where conflicts came up because ignorant townsfolk thought they were consorting with demons rather than mortal Ork'rus.

Because of the late arrival of Ork'rus to the greater part of Anthuli, many Ork'rus often find they prefer to live among their own kind because they do not have to be as careful around other Ork'rus as they do most other species. Other Ork'rus understand the ways to interact with each other that can cause problems with different species. Some have compared it to being among other species is like going to a job and being professional, but when they return to the Ork'rus camp they can relax and be themselves.

Emotions among Ork'rus generally run hot, however, after becoming more socialized with the other species, many Ork'rus have learned ways to tone down and direct their intense emotions to be useful to them. Many channel those feelings into being productive and building a strong work ethic.

Music

Ork'rus music has been compared to the clash of battle more than once. Ork'rus prefer loud music often including a drum, bass instruments, growls, and yelling. Ork'rus composers put together songs which are intended to get the blood pumping as if getting psyched up for battle. The fast pace of their music is intended to give a sense of power and urgency.

Even their performers are generally aggressive being able to strike their foes without missing a beat. Ork'rus call this a Rocker Performance.

Artwork

Art among the Ork'rus is a finely crafted weapon, or a trophy from a memorable kill. Often, Ork'rus camps are a little shocking to outsiders because they include what looks like a primitive style of building, however, for most Ork'rus they care less about finery, and more about function or the message something conveys.

Some compare Ork'rus art to warnings to others. Some elements of Ork'rus artwork is often shocking or off putting to ensure people know Ork'rus have little issue when things get real.

Clothing

Ork'rus prefer clothing which is loose but durable. Many Ork'rus wear kilts and loose shirts to allow them freedom of

movement and comfort. Many Ork'rus still prefer furs and leathers to wool or cotton clothing, but rarely will Ork'rus care what someone is wearing unless the individual Ork'rus has a particular strong opinion on it.

Language

Some Ork'rus speak a dialect of Abyssal called Grolk. Grolk is a harsh sounding language and many Ork'rus have begun to abandon its use to instead learn the Tradespeak. Between their work as guards, mercenaries, and traders, Grolk is not spoken widely enough for many Ork'rus to care to learn it. Another issue with Grolk is it does not have a written form. The only places Grolk is used with any regularity is among Ork'rus storytellers who keep the oral tradition of the Ork'rus.

Hierarchy

Instead of a true hierarchy, Ork'rus have something more akin to a pecking order. Trolsk typically sit at the top of this order, with Ettins closely behind them. Next come the Orks, then Hobgoblins and Goblins swap places depending on the Goblins and Hobgoblins in the area. Other individuals get placed in the pecking order based on their strength, capability, or willingness to show how ruthless they can be.

This order is not always the model, and at times certain individuals can rise or fall in the order. While Ork'rus may stand above another in the order, in many cases its often looked at like siblings, the eldest siblings picking on their younger siblings. However, if someone were to pick on one of their siblings, then the older siblings would deliver a proper beating to the outsider.

Military

Ork'rus are often used as mercenary shock troops in military campaigns. Allowed to rush ahead of the main force to engage the enemy, Ork'rus units delight in getting the first or last kill. Some Ork'rus units often will look for skilled warriors and pick them out to fight them. If the fight is worthwhile, the Ork'rus will take a trophy from the person to show they were able to beat them. Many Ork'rus have a long list of stories for the trophies they carry or keep at home.

Many Ork'rus units also make use of bards or entertainers to help them get psyched up for the fight ahead and throwing themselves into each other during the performances to like a warmup for the coming battle.

Heraldry

Most Ork'rus take pride in developing their own heraldry, using outlandish colors, designs, and methods of displaying their loyalty to set them apart from other forces. Many devices include symbols of painful ways of dying, weapons, or simply a tusked face with some other symbol to help differentiate it from others.

Therios

Therios are one of the most diverse of the species inhabiting Anthuli, however, Anthuli is not where the species originated. Unlike most of the Anthuli populace, the Therios are anthropomorphic beings resembling animals of all shapes and sizes. It is said their homeland, the continent of Kuh'nal to the south across the Ravenous Sea is their species' birthplace. While the Therios have been living on Anthuli for dozens of generations, many still speak of their ancestral home Kuh'nal with reverence. Unlike the Aelf'enaï, the Therios can travel back and forth between their ancestral home and Anthuli. However, the Ravenous Sea between the two continents gets its name from the many reefs, whirlpools, and other treacherous obstacles which populate its breadth. It is possible to travel around it, however, this takes several months even for the skills of the Cormah Fleets.

For nearly every type of animal, or even insect, moving across the face of the world, it is said there is a Therios with similar characteristics. As with all sentient species, the subspecies Therios have long fought among themselves on Kuh'nal. Once Anthuli was discovered some Therios wished to explore possible new territory to live in, however, they quickly learned they were not the only sentient species to inhabit Anthuli. Marveling at the engineering of the Humans and Dwearn of Anthuli they decided to join with them and escape the more rigid hierarchies of Kuh'nal and the many clans and factions of their homeland.

Despite the jokes made by some of the other species, Therios do not and cannot mate with their animal kin. There is a distinction between a Therios and an animal which is not crossed because in many ways the animals they resemble are believed to be the purest form of a Therios. Therios view animals they share traits with as their natural kin, but still as a distinctively different species. All Therios feel an instinctive kinship and connection to their natural kin. For a Therios, killing their natural kin is like trying to kill a relative. Some Therios have formed their own faiths around this, treating the natural kin as avatars of the Primalis, or the ideal of their natural kin. Even Therios without religious feelings about it cannot help but feel a connection.

While the Therios are considered one species, they are a collection of individual species under one Family classification. Therios are only able to bear children with those of similar characteristics to themselves. A feline Therios could not have children with a canine Therios for instance. At times this does cause difficulties for Therios who fall in love with those outside their clans. Each clan views Therios who fall in love outside their clan differently, some clans demand their children have families within the Clan while others may accept their children finding a mate among a different species.

Children of Kuh'nal

While there are as many creation stories among the Therios as there are different breeds, all Therios agree, the cradle

of their kind is Kuh'nal. For as long as any of the storytellers among the Therios could recall, the Therios had lived on Kuh'nal without seeing any sentient creatures without their beast like countenances. For generations, Kuh'nal lived by rigid hierarchies often forcing Therios of similar breeds to remain together for the sake of safety. In the earliest days, these clans of Therios would hunt each other and their less intelligent kin to survive. Kuh'nal has a variety of landscapes across it allowing Therios of all types to find homes. These hunting clans began to develop internal structure as the Therios experimented with art, philosophy, music, and other higher concepts than their natural kin. Many clans developed the belief the animals of the world were extensions of the deities of their cultures and revered as sacred.

Unlike other Species however, the Therios rarely grew into large collections due to limits on hunting grounds and space across their homeland. The largest of clans numbered in the few hundred even among the more prolific subgroups. Food was often the most valuable resource on Kuh'nal and rather than trade with coin or valuable metals or stones, the Therios had a distinct barter system based on food as the most valuable resource available. Some groups of Therios did learn to farm and gather which helped to mitigate some of the scarcity of foods, however, for as long as any Therios could remember, it was hunt or be hunted. Many Therios believed they had to mimic the diets of their natural kin, limiting themselves. However, a revolution came when several minds among different tribes felt this would only lead to ruin if the practice was continued.

While many refused to do so, several clans began experimenting with a more omnivorous diet and found they thrived. While many clans still struggled with foods, they felt were awful, it helped ease the worst of the hunting each other. The farming clans quickly found themselves sought out to learn how to farm and even cook food to help reduce the killing. For several generations, this helped bring some level of peace to the northern coastal regions of Kuh'nal. The warm temperate climate and lush lands there helped these attempts at farming to thrive. These communities develop often including several different kinds of Therios working together.

The Carrion Hunts

Older generations of Therios saw this as an abomination which brought about the Carrion Hunts. Older generations and those unable to accept this change began hunting the more omnivorous of their own kind and killing them. Clans split as many turned on their own kind. For most clans this is considered one of the darkest and most shameful periods of Therios history. While those focused on omnivorous diets had let their hunting and fighting skills get rusty, they were not ready for the savage assault by the hunters who had kept their skills honed and were ready to fight to survive.

Every Therios who participated in the Carrion Hunts had their own reasons for why, somewhere afraid of their ancient traditions being lost, others simply were hungry and could not accept the new foods given to them. Several groups of Therios just could not tolerate anything other than

their normal diet making a shift to the omnivorous diet. Regardless of their reasons, their fears turned into anger. This was then directed toward the farming Therios. Rather than try to find some compromise, the Carrion Hunters launched surprise attacks against many Therios settlements. The omnivorous Therios had a larger population due to not lacking as many resources, but they struggled under the surprise and savage attacks.

Once the momentum of the surprise attacks ran out, the omnivorous Therios were able to hold their own, however, the Carrion Hunters kept finding more support, even within the farming settlements. Some Therios felt better by returning to their original diets and it became a difficult time when few people could be trusted, or a long-time friend suddenly gives into their hunger and trying to devour their neighbors.

A Chance Meeting with the Cormah

It was during this time, several seafaring clans decided to explore more of the ocean and see if they could find islands or other refuges to hide away from the worst of the Hunts. A few brave Therios discovered Anthuli and realized it was another enormous land they could escape from the more bloodthirsty of the original Kuh'nal clans. Words spread like wildfire among the clans and many Therios begin trying to find passage. As the ocean fairing clans passed back and forth, they soon encountered the Cormah. In a bizarre coincidence, the Therios saved the lives of a crew of a Cormahn shipwrecked on a reef. The crew had been stranded for weeks and were on the last bits of their rations when a few young Therios came to their aid, giving them fish to sustain themselves.

The sailors were thankful for their strange saviors, who in turn helped them return to their homes on the Cormahn Archipelago. From there, the Therios met the Cormahn matriarchs and formed a pact. Unbeknownst to the Therios, the eldest daughter of the Salt Mother was saved by their generosity. In turn the Matriarch pledged to ferry the Therios to Anthuli if they could show them how to reach Kuh'nal. Slowly, ships began arriving at Kuh'nal and the Cormah were amazed to see the wide range of folk simply looking to find a new home.

When the first Cormahn ship arrived on Anthuli with the refugees of Kuh'nal, many human kingdoms were afraid of these strange beast people. However, the Salt Mother pledged the Cormah would halt trade with any kingdom who would not accept the Therios. It was not long before the Therios proved themselves as capable scouts, couriers, hunters, warriors, and even magus. Having the sea connection to the natural world the Therios do, they were able to keep up even with wizened Anthuli mages. Those who left Kuh'nal for Anthuli sought a more civilized life and did not wish harm on the humans, however, there were some difficulties from time to time as more aggressive clans found their way to Anthuli. Over the years, the Therios were slowly accepted by nearly every kingdom, seeing the Therios as a valuable resource. Over the course of about

two generations, many who wished to leave Kuh'nal had escaped and found a new home in Anthuli.

Even to present day, many Therios regard the Cormah as their allies with many more aquatic oriented Therios serving on Cormahn ships as crew and guides. Some trade happens between Kuh'nal and Anthuli however, it is usually only a ship or two every few months rather than the many ships coming in and going across most of the Anthuli ports. Since then, the Therios have adapted quite well at living among Humans, Dwearn, Aelf'enai, and even Ork'rus.

The Therios arrived on Anthuli nearly 500 years before the Soli left Sol. In that time, nearly every nation on Anthuli accepted the Therios. The few who did not were the few nations quickly conquered by the Soli. Many Therios joke this is because those nations did not accept Therios to fight for them. While the Therios spread out, many felt proud to call themselves citizens of other nations. While they may look different, most Therios came to integrate well into their new home.

The Yemanism and the Hunt Sacrament

When the Soli began expanding, few Therios converted, most seeing this as just another territorial dispute among rival clans. In time however, as the Soli gained ground, more and more Therios listened to what the Soli had to say. It is uncommon, but some Therios do convert to Yemanism. While at times they do struggle to follow all the Yemanist teachings, some Therios see it as the next step towards enlightenment much like the farmers tried in Kuh'nal.

A somewhat unpleasant practice some Soli missionaries force Therios converts to perform is to hunt and kill one of their natural kin to prove themselves in the eyes of El'Yemana. While this practice does not exist anywhere in the holy texts, this Hunt Sacrament has become a practice to ensure the Therios is serious about their beliefs and giving up on the old ways. This alone has caused many Therios to fight beside the enemies of the Soli because even if a Therios is not necessarily religious, there is an almost instinctive revulsion to harming the natural kin a Therios shares traits with.

The Expansion Wars

Therios have fought on both sides of the Expansion Wars. Each new war does see more and more Therios converting. However, there is a lot of back and forth on which path is the right one. Those opposed to Yemanism believe being forced into the Hunt Sacrament is cruel and unusual. Even those willing feel the fact they need to kill to prove themselves is worthy of the faith when no one else does is not only racist, but unnecessary.

Those on the other side of the argument have come to agree, it is a symbolic break with old traditions, just like leaving behind the old traditions of Kuh'nal and coming to Anthuli. Some even go as far to say they were meant for this and to grow beyond the barbaric traditions of the hunt they

must break with the connection they have to the natural world. Their kind have broken from the natural world once and grew better for it. Though there is a great deal of logic behind this argument, many Yemanist Therios bear a secret guilt over the act of killing one of their kin and struggle with it every day of their lives.

Subgroups among the Therios

Since there are so many types of Therios, it has become difficult to categorize them and most across Anthuli must make their own opinions of each Therios as they vary wildly. Mammalian Therios are often more communal and enjoy the company of others. Avian Therios commonly serve as couriers, scouts, and even spies for the various nations of Anthuli. Even the Therios with insect like qualities have found they can assimilate with other species even if there is sometimes some confusion in communication due to a somewhat different mindset compared to their fleshier kin. Therios do at times still stick to grouping by similar types, but many young Therios often strike out on their own to find their way in the world and explore. Much like the many nations of humans, the Therios have found ways to adapt to cultures and make their way in the world.

Scholars have begun to categorize Therios based on their hides, but this terminology is not perfect by any stretch of their imagination. Numerous examples of some clans of Therios have defied this convention based on their own unique traits. Among the Species of Anthuli the Therios are truly the most varied in their natural abilities.

Therios have five classifications based on hide. First are the Carapace Therios. Whether more like an insect, crustacean or simply have a harder skin than most, the Carapace Therios is defined by having a rigid carapace or skin rather than a flexible one like other Therios. Carapace Therios are also known to have a different mindset than other Therios. Many insect-like Carapace Therios often things in terms of community or hive and find they enjoy being workers for the community. Their seemingly endless stamina to keep going has proven time and again how valuable Therios are to a community. Carapace Therios can also have the other end of the spectrum when it comes to mindset, some primarily those based on crustaceans, spiders, and other solitary bugs or creatures tend to be quick to act, and even quicker to return to their own devices.

Next are the Feathered Therios. While the name does conjure images of birds primarily, there are several types of ground based Feathered Therios such as those resembling an ostrich, chicken, or emu. Feathered Therios make for excellent performers, messengers, merchants, and speakers. Prone to speaking fast and moving faster, many Feathered Therios can be quite talkative. Many types of feathery creatures are known for having sharp eyes, and this has translated into a good eye for business, art, and even politics. However, this should not discount Feathered Therios who go to war. Many have found they make for excellent rangers and snipers.

Next are the Furred Therios, which tend to be mammalian, but not always. Furred Therios are often a catch all for any kind of beastkin with fur on them. There is a small group of hairy tarantula based Therios which have stumped scholars in how to classify them. Most Furred Therios are generally highly involved in their communities, whether they are more extroverted like canines or introverted like many feline Therios. Because of the variation in abilities, it is difficult to pin down any general statements about them without having the context of what kind of creature they are related to specifically. Generally, the Furred Therios often embodies many of the qualities and behaviors of their beastkin.

Leathery Therios are relatively rare, however, they are often the largest voice in the room. Based on creatures like cows, bison, hippos, elephants, and even some kinds of bears, Leathery Therios are defined by having a thick or rubbery hide and commonly have short coarse hair compared to Furred Therios with longer finer hair. One somewhat strange outlier, however, are Therios based on jellyfish, octopus, or squids. Therios related to these creatures tend to have a rubbery hide which is hard to pierce as in most cases it just refuses to cut. Leathery are often relaxed and rarely in a hurry to do anything. However, this should not leave an impression of laziness or apathy, most Leathery Therios are conserving energy for when it is necessary. When threatened or angered, Leathery Therios have no difficulty using their bulk and impressive strength with sudden and devastating consequences to those around them.

Finally, are the Scaled Therios, while primarily comprised of snakes and lizards, there are some types of Scaled Therios who resemble fish as well. The primary factor determining a Scaled Therios is their skin is covered in scales whether small and flexible or thick and rigid. Many Scaled Therios come from cold-blooded species and embody this trait. Few of them enjoy the cold but adore warmth. Their cold-bloodedness also carries over to their views on others. While some may feel Scaled Therios are intimidating or heartless, many of them are merely not impressed by others. Scaled Therios tend to be stoic and reserved compared to many other Therios. Their quick reactions are attributed to watching the situations around them coolly and being prepared at a moment's notice. Yet there are those heartwarming moments when even Scaled Therios need a laugh or do something amusing for the sake of others.

Habitat and its Impact on Therios

Many Therios have also been classified by the habitat their beastkin spend their time in predominantly. Aerial Therios usually have wings or membranes for gliding. There have been instances of this seen across all but the Leathery Therios, however scholars believe it could be possible.

Aquatic Therios usually are excellent swimmers and their beastkin spend much of their time in the water.

Strider Therios have beastkin who spend most of their time on land and are generally quite fleetfooted.

Finally Subterranean Therios have beastkin who burrow and use their burrows to hide from predators or spring traps on others.

These habitats have also come to flavor the types of Therios. For instances a Carapace Therios might be based on flying insects. An Aquatic Scaled Therios could be a crocodile or alligator. Strider Furred Therios may be particularly quick animals like deer or a cheetah.

This has led to a slang term for cryptid Therios. Though not recognized as a classification, some Therios have developed odd combinations of abilities. While they may fall into one classification, sometimes unique combinations of abilities may manifest in them. There are the few rare Therios which develop traits not entirely seen in any natural species. For example, an aerial scaled Therios with wings on its back but thick heavy scales and many other common traits of the Scaled. Until further research has been put into them, these Therios remain a mystery to scholars studying their biology

The Dire Epidemic

One thing some Therios have come to be concerned about is the rise in what is called the Dire Epidemic. In the last hundred years or so, animals have been developing oddly, growing to larger sizes, developing more durable hides, and some even becoming highly aggressive. Some Therios wonder what this could mean for them. While no Therios has shown signs of this change, many wonder if it is just a matter of time. While these changes have yielded new animal materials which can be put to excellent use, it does leave a concern for what the future holds.

Some beastkin may show signs of the Dire Epidemic, and not have changed much from their original size or demeanor. This has caused a great stir among hunters, scholars, and Therios in particular. These creatures are not born this way, something in the world is causing them to change, however, no one can narrow down what the cause is at this time. Even farm animals can develop signs of the Dire Epidemic. Many farmers have turned to killing these animals in hopes it will not spread to other creatures.

Culture

All Therios find when they bond with someone, they become nearly inseparable. However, some Therios find it harder to bond with people than others. Some find it hard to determine if it was the animal or the Therios which helped develop certain associations with certain types of animals.

This has led to some interesting interpretations of different cultures the Therios has grown up. For instance, a Therios who grew up among the Erce might be more in touch with their primal nature and enjoy simply being in the wild. Therios who have lived in the Narseth Wastes have adopted a strong love of fighting and some have even developed a particularly strong fighting form just for using their natural weapons. Even those who have grown up

around the Cormah find they excel as merchants and sailors even if they are not an aquatic species.

While Therios are certainly capable of devouring other species, many look down on it as backsliding to a more primitive time. However, most communities will not begrudge a Therios if they indulge themselves against enemies so long as they do not have to clean up the mess. More carnivorous Therios often volunteer as guards, hunters, and protectors happy to sate their hungers on people who seek to harm their charges.

Yemanist Therios are forced to give up this practice and instead must eat as everyone else under the Yemanist faith do. Devouring other sentient creatures is considered a form of desecration among the Yemanists.

Music

Therios are fond of music and song often adding their own unique take on it. Several types of Therios have taken to creating music using their beastkin's sounds as part of the accompaniment. Barks, squawks, yips, growls, hisses, and the like are all common in Therios composed music.

It is a regular sight to see Therios drawn to a good performance by anyone willing to play. Some Therios composers have gone as far as to eschew all constructed instruments and simply use their animal noises as the only sounds for the song. This style has yet to be named, but it does seem to appeal more to certain Therios over others.

Artwork

Therios artwork is sometimes called primitive simply because most Therios prefer to use natural elements in their work without needing to shape them or alter them much. From stacking stones, to weaving reeds, many Therios appreciate a natural style to their art. Oddly enough this has led to many discussions on how people should interpret Therios art on whether it is more abstract or simply primitive.

Clothing

Therios do not have any forms of 'traditional' clothing as their people did not carry many of the traditions of their homeland with them to Anthuli, choosing to leave behind the old ways to embrace a better life. However, one common practice which did survive the trip across the Ravenous Sea was trophy taking. Many Therios take pride in collecting trophies of all sorts. Whether from a kill, winning a competition, or something to remind them of an impactful event, Therios often carry with them trophies to remind themselves of these times and show off among other Therios. This has led to a new type of storytelling competition common among Therios which has even spread to other Species where two participants will regale each other with stories of what these trophies mean to them. Often these contests have a theme chosen by those watching. Some may be as simple as, the saddest memories, the greatest triumphs, bloodiest battles, or the

most meaningful trophies. The winner is typically the one who evokes a significant reaction from the crowd watching.

Language

Language was a difficult concept for the early Therios, many had their own variations, dialects, and ways to express themselves, some going as far as certain gestures and postures. As the Therios developed as a whole, a unified form of sign language became popular to help clans communicate better. This language is called Clawsign. To this day, many still practice Clawsign, yet some of its more nuanced meanings have been lost with the passage of time. Many Therios know at least a few Clawsign gestures, while some clans even have their own variations, they only use among themselves. Most Therios have come to learn Trade Tongue as it was the most readily available and seemed the most effective way to communicate with their new neighbors. Sailors who have traveled to Kuh'nal tell stories of many of the Therios there using Clawsign regularly and only knowing limited amounts of Tradespeak.

Hierarchy

Therios rarely pay much heed to the complex hierarchies of the humans. Most simply prefer finding their own group and working among them. Generally, Therios are better suited for small group tactics rather than large engagements. However, within those small groups, Therios will respect a good leader but will not hesitate to question and challenge when they feel the direction given is a bad choice.

Some Therios, most commonly Carapace Therios, may fall into a subservient role to a powerful individual. This attitude can be dangerous depending on who the individual is they find themselves subservient to and that person's goals. Some claim it is instinct, others a sense of belonging which drives them to this. However, if a Therios has had enough of such a life, they may challenge their leader to prove they are worthy of their loyalty.

Military

The Therios do not organize themselves into military units simply because when too many come together, too many of them want to either be the leader or are impossible to lead much like herding cats. This has led to many leaders giving Therios some free reign on how they go about missions and generally keep them in small specialist squads. If a Therios is put in charge of the unit, they will often expect their charges to follow their example. In many cases this has become almost second nature to the Therios to act of their own accord during a mission.

While Therios can be brutal warriors, few do so well as soldiers. Among Therios they would rather pick their targets carefully as if hunting rather than simply charge an enemy. Therios with gentler or cowardly beastkin rarely join combat groups because their first instinct is to flee rather than fight. Most Therios who do fight have beastkin known for not backing down and fighting instead of running.

Heraldry

When Therios band together, almost inevitably, they use symbols related to their beastkin as their banners or sigils. When mixed groups of Therios come together to form a group, the symbols used include physical traits common to those involved or chosen by the leader. Paw prints, claw marks, or teeth are all commonly used on Therios banners.

Verdantia

Unlike the other Species of Anthuli, the Verdanti are closer to the Effigies than other Species. Verdanti are a species of sentient plant people with a strong connection to nature and its ebb and flow. Appearing in an astounding array of shapes, sizes, and sophistication, the Verdanti are a diverse people. The one thing uniting Verdanti as a family is their origins as plants rather than being born like most other species. Like the Therios, the Verdanti have so many different variations it is nearly impossible to categorize them all. Unlike other Species, the Verdanti are not as overly concerned about their heritage or where they come from aside from having regions special to them. Most Verdanti are not nurtured by parents but rather raised communally with no special attachment to the ones who produced the seeds they spring from. However, this means individual Verdantia are often more at home in communal settings and find themselves drawn to groups of other beings and seek to create harmony in those groups wherever they can.

Most Verdanti have an interesting relationship with the sun, most forms of Verdanti draw energy from the sun and appreciate sunning themselves whenever they have the chance. This has led to some seeing Verdantia as inappropriate at times, however, the Verdanti do not understand why other species get hung up on nudity. Verdanti do not reproduce the same way as most fleshy species, instead collecting pollen from the air or from other plants. Many Verdanti are asexual but take joy in teasing other species about their strange hang-ups over nudity or their desire for intercourse.

Springtime

Many Verdanti pay little attention to the passage of time. Before meeting other species, they did not truly have a concept of time. To them each day is all that matters. Memories were important, but the passage of time was not. It is unknown how old the Verdanti as a species are however, there are many regions around Anthuli have stories or at the least allusions to the Verdanti throughout their history.

Some believe the Verdanti were created to be the caretakers of nature and its voice in a world driven by other species. Many stories of the early Verdanti tell of them quietly guiding people or staunchly protecting areas from abuses by other species. There are also stories of Verdanti teaching people how to respect the natural world and providing blessings to those who live in harmony with nature. Though many of these stories are passed down through the generations, no one is truly sure where they come from or how old they may be.

In many times, Verdanti do not care to be involved in the major events of history because people come and go, yet nature will always be present. In the few instances of the Verdanti united to try and stop are prior to the Accord of the Leaf and during the Expansion Wars. Throughout history most Verdanti are simply willing to let folks go about their business.

The Accord of the Leaf

If accounts can be trusted, as most were recorded by Fae delegates, when the Aelf'enai and Dwearn were still developing their own way, they foresaw these two species would likely not see eye to eye. For decades the Verdanti discussed and tried to find solutions to how to prevent these two ancient powerhouses from ruining the world around them. Eventually a wise Treant only known as Snowbark convinced many other Verdanti of the need to act. However, due to their difficulty understanding time, they found themselves at the precipice of war before they could truly intervene.

With uncharacteristic swiftness, the Verdanti gathered many of their people and even convinced the Fae Courts to intercede. The Fae were similarly concerned and felt they had a chance to stop the war before it started. As the Aelf'enai and Dwearn prepared, the largest gathering of Verdanti and Fae ever seen met the armies spoiling to annihilate each other on the field. Between the warnings from the Dryads of the displeasure of nature to the Fae prepared to use their strange magics to make life quite difficult for both sides, the Dwearn and Aelf'enai agreed to meet.

After long negotiations, dragged on by Snowbark's need to ensure the terms were not only fair, but reasonable for all involved, the Accord was signed, and war was averted. In Snowbark's mind the Accord should last forever, however, the other three species felt they would need to meet again in one hundred years to discuss the treaty again. To many of the Verdanti still alive to see the signing, it felt as if it had been yesterday for them when the treaty was to be renegotiated. However, this time between Resh'enor and the Dwearn delegation, it seemed the Accord would not hold. Desperately pleading with them to reconsider, Snowbark's requests fell on deaf ears. Even the Fae were unmoved, having grown weary of the bickering.

Though the battles among the Aelf and Dwearn took place all over, the Verdanti tried to intervene on their own. Unfortunately, this led to the gentle Verdanti being caught in the crossfire. Seeing his people shredded by the hubris of the two species, Snowbark slipped into a slumber and never woke up. It is said somewhere in the world is an oak tree with face which weeps eternally.

Seeing it was no use, the remaining Verdanti hid themselves away knowing they would not be able to avert the catastrophes to come. When Ishalinoria crashed into the Hymspyd, the Verdanti immediately knew as if somewhere the world cried out in pain. A wave of ennuui spread among the Verdanti. Most secluded themselves from the world in their Glades and simply hoped the world would heal from the wounds it suffered.

The Long Autumn

For many generations the Verdanti did not associate with other Species due to difficulties finding common ground with Species who showed little to no regard for the natural world around them. Verdanti gathered in what they called

Glades, or as is often described their own form of villages among others of their kind. After generations in the rest of the world, many early Humans and Dwearn had never seen a Verdanti.

While the world grew and changed around them, the Verdanti kept themselves secluded, however this would not last long as Humans, Dwearn, and other species began to explore the wilds. Many Verdanti remembered the hubris of the Aelf'enai and Dwearn and refused to associate with them. Humans they felt deserved a chance at first because the few who did find the Verdanti Glades were kind and in awe of the natural beauty of such places.

However, greedy humans soon spoiled this image when many realized the wealth of rare wood, herbs, and ores around the Verdanti Glades. As a byproduct of so many Verdanti in the area, there was little need for using resources. They required little in from the land around them aside from water, sunlight, and simple foods. Since they had little reason to fight, most Verdanti were unable to fight back when the Humans came for their resources. Even the mighty Treant were felled, and their bodies cut apart searching for rare or powerful magical wood. As word spread of such treasures, many Glades were attacked. The reasons may have varied, but to the Verdanti it was all the same.

Reign of Ashes

Only referred to as the Reign of Ashes by the few Verdanti with a long enough memory. During this time the Verdanti were forced to flee their Glades or risk being killed and cut apart to sate the greed of other species. Many Verdanti traveled across Anthuli only to be pursued. Hundreds if not thousands of Verdanti were killed by ignorant people using any excuse they could to justify their atrocities.

What Verdanti could, escaped to the region which would become Erce. There, they encountered Humans and Fae who wished to live in harmony with the world as they did. As the hunters of the Verdanti followed them to Erce, the Verdanti expected to be betrayed like so many before. Instead, the early Erce were willing to fight and even kill to protect their natural siblings. Encouraged and renewed by the Erce and Fae's ways, the Verdanti began establishing their Glades once again.

During the Reign of Ashes, the Ercen would travel to other lands secretly and try to rescue Glades, guiding them to safe places to ensure the Verdanti would not be wiped out. The Verdanti were distrustful of anyone outside their homes, only truly willing to speak with the Ercen and those they vouched for in those dark days.

In time the newer generations of Verdanti became curious of the outside world and began exploring usually with an Ercen cohort to protect them or at least vouch for them outside the haven of Erce. This became more and more common as the Soli began their mission to leave the Homeland and convert the entire continent. Unknowingly of the Soli's plans, many Verdanti who had never been at risk

for manipulation or the seductive lure of the Yemanist Faith, many Verdanti inadvertently converted despite the warnings of their Ercen cousins. Many Verdanti were drawn to the idea of a being represented by the sun as many Verdanti revered the sun for their sustenance. Before this most Verdanti did not truly participate in faiths aside from the Erce Moonson. While seemingly innocuous, the converted Verdanti found themselves put in difficult positions when the Expansion Wars began to rage. Many clung to their faith desperately trying to convince kin and many others to join them. However, as people began to see how far the Soli would go, this caused a rift among even the peaceful Verdanti.

Many converted Verdanti were forced to rationalize the needs of the faith were a good enough reason for the Soli to begin taking resources from the land in mass quantities. To the converts, it was for the betterment of all, and many had sacrificed to find a better way of life. This horrified other Verdanti, and many Glades struggled to come to terms with their own people turning their backs on their ways especially for people who would do to those who did not convert the same things previous generations of Humans had done during the Reign of Ashes. Though normally peaceful and desiring talk rather than action, many Verdanti took up arms to fight back against the Soli seeing them as invaders and murderers of their simpler kin.

Nature's Wrath and the Expansion Wars

Throughout the Expansion Wars, the Verdanti watched in horror as people killed each other needlessly over words and thoughts. Each time a new War broke out, the Verdanti grew anxious of whether the Reign of Ashes would come again. However, by the 3rd Expansion War, they had accepted soon their people would have to fight if they did not wish to become fodder for some Soli project or torn apart by greedy people.

Anyone present during preparations for war was surprised to see dozens of Verdanti join them with a sort of grim determination uncharacteristic of their species. Combining their gifts with those of others, the Verdanti helped give not only more warriors, but aid to those injured in the fighting. While they did not have to fight much, the Verdanti still had an impact. Many took over duties of caring for the camps of their people, cooking, sewing, tending to the wounded, and passing messages. Only the Treants joined in the actual fighting.

However, in the early stages of the 4th Expansion War, several Verdanti started going missing along with Erce. Several Therios and Fae, more adept at eluding capture returned with word that Soli soldiers coming from the east had kidnapped their kin. Outraged and fearful of the fates of their people, the Verdanti traveled beside the other species in attempts to get them their people back. However, this proved to be far more difficult because the Soli were prepared for an attack. No matter how hard they tried, unless small groups tried to slip across the border into Agrineas, any large movements were stopped by Soli and

Agrinean troops. Even the groups who made it across the border struggled to not be captured and sent to labor for the construction of the Celestial City.

The Aftermath of the fall of Agrineas

Not even the Verdanti were safe from the maniacal desires of Monzori Hektram. Both Ercen and Verdanti were kidnapped and forced to work beneath the cruel lash of Hektram. However, unlike many of the other Species caught in the backlash of the ritual which formed the Mortaeans, the Verdanti did not die per se, but instead were changed. Treants and Flora caught in the wake of the backlash fell into a deathlike slumber and rapidly mold and mushrooms began to grow from their bodies. The handful of captured Dryads were the only ones left unscathed, but each of them felt a soul chilling fear of what was to come. Not even the intervention of faith could awaken the molding Verdanti.

After five days, the fallen Verdanti awoke but had been forever changed. Though they retained some semblance of their former selves, their memories were gone and each one was like a blank slate. The survivors fled back to Erce dragging their transformed companions with them. In the first villages they found across the Erce border, many were frightened of the changed Verdanti. Concerned by what had happened, the villages allowed the survivors to stay temporarily while they decided what to do. In time more and more refugees returned, Humans and Mortaeans among them. The presence of Mortaeans terrified the Erce people.

Forced to make a choice, many Erce elders banished the humans, now befouled by Hektram's Folly, and would have done the same to the new fungal Verdanti but Dryads demanded they be allowed to stay. Despite their change, they were still Verdanti. Reluctantly the Mycerim were allowed to stay. This did cause a great deal of mistrust among the Erce especially those who were forced to turn away family and friends who had been captured. Though they saw the wisdom in their elder's choices, they resented the Mycerim getting special treatment.

Known as the Mycerim, the twisted Verdanti were related to mushrooms rather than trees, flowers or other plants. Recognizing the plight of their kin, the Verdanti accepted the Mycerim among them. Ancient Verdanti saw this new breed of Verdanti as an omen of dark times ahead. Though many were not sure if the Mycerim would last, before long the Mycerim began to reproduce on their own, swelling their population with almost alarming swiftness. Many Verdanti accepted the fact they could no longer stand by and wait for others to bring harm to them or their kin.

Waking the Forest during the 5th Expansion War

Having spent many years preparing and learning to fight beside their kin, the Erce Verdanti began preparing a desperate defense against the Soli. Each year the Yemanists were claiming more and more land, cutting down the forests and ravaging the lands for farming, minerals, or

other resources to feed their war machines. Confident they were unmatched, the Soli began pushing harder and deeper into the lands of Erce, not even bothering to try and convert those they found and instead taking whatever they wanted. Many feared the Soli would simply slaughter them all and no one would be able to unite the Glades, the Septs of the Rinshoa, or the Erce to fight back against the encroaching Yemanist. Knowing something had to be done, Verdanti and Erce unleashed the Walking Forest. Within the lands of Erce, truly enormous Skywood Trees stood vigil over the world. With the prompting of many Glades of Verdanti, the Skywoods came to life. No one is quite sure how this was done, but the Verdanti claim the spirits of their people return to nature when they pass on, and it was the collective will of generations of Verdanti which brought the Skywood to life.

When trees taller and wider than most castle towers came to life and began lashing out against those in their path, the Soli were forced to retreat. However, whatever power the Verdanti had awoken, seemingly all the fauna of the area had come to life with murderous purpose. Before long much of the landscape was strewn with the corpses of the Yemanists and their converts. In the carnage however, a new breed of murderous flora began to grow and spread from the lands of Erce. Known as Sylvagore, the flora which had become soaked in the blood of so many grew to hunger for it and were twisted into beasts which would hunt for their meals unlike most other plants. Sylvagore are not sentient like Verdanti, but instead act more like a wild beast. Many strange and unnerving plants have transformed into Sylvagores with all sorts of bizarre behaviors and qualities. Many feared their collective anger had awakened something vengeful in Mother Nature and it now had a taste for violence. All but the furthest reaches of Anthuli have begun being attacked by Sylvagore.

Few know the true origins of the Sylvagore, but many Verdanti suspect the Walking Forest may have had some influence on the event. The few Verdanti who have tried to communicate with Sylvagore have either ended up injured or killed by these vicious plants. Unable to distinguish between others, it seems Sylvagore can only recognize their own kind even if they are wildly different from each other. Sylvagore show a dizzying array of forms and ways of incapacitating or killing their prey only to plant on the corpse of their enemy and consume them.

The Botany of Verdanti

Among the Verdanti there are four commonly recognized types of Verdanti, but each type covers a vast array of people in many shapes and sizes. Verdanti are often optimistic and cheerful, preferring to focus on the present rather than be bogged down by the past. This can at times seem absent minded to other species, but many Verdanti would rather think of it as having a forgiving nature and a willingness to move on with life.

From a biological standpoint, Verdanti are built like most other species, have organs, and excrete waste, however their organs and skin are quite different. Many Verdanti

have skin like the plant they bear a resemblance to, but it is far more elastic than normal plant fibers. Verdanti do share several organs with other meat-based species, but can sustain themselves with minimal food, and water alone if they so choose to do so.

Unlike other Species, most Verdanti are asexual and reproduce by gathering pollen, or spores in the air from other plant species. Verdanti may choose when they wish to collect this pollen or spores to create a seedling or a spore colony to then grow a new Verdanti. When the seedling or spore colony is ready, the Verdanti place it in a place suitable to grow and allow it to grow on its own. For many Verdanti, they simply awaken one day, pull themselves from the ground and go in search of meaning to their newfound sentience. While Verdanti can have intercourse with other species, it is impossible for them to bear children with other sentient species.

First among the Verdanti are the Dryads. While they are the most humanoid in shape, Dryads have a bark like skin and do not have bones like other Species. Instead, their bodies appear to be made mostly of a highly flexible wood. Dryads are believed to be protected by the Deities of the world for serving a special purpose. Only the most brazen or mad folk would dare try to kill a Dryad. Many who have found their luck changes for the worse as if the deities of the world had turned their back on the Dryad's murderer. Many Dryads live whimsical and innocent lives, however, some Dryad rapidly become weary of the world as they experience many of the conflicts of the world. Despite their connection to the world, they do understand the cycle of nature and understand at times some plants must be used by other beings to survive. When Dryads intervene is when those beings take too much, and nature is put at risk of falling into ruin. Dryads have the smallest population among the Verdanti, and it is not common to find more than a few in a region at any given time.

The second smallest population within the Verdanti are the Treants. Ranging from thin and flexible, to bulky and powerful, Treants are sentient treelike beings. Far more durable than their cousins, Treants often serve as defenders of Glades or others. Slow to anger, many Treants would rather put themselves in harm's way and reason with others before resorting to violence immediately. However, when there is no other means, Treants become crushing juggernauts striking fear in their foes. Most Treant prefer to take the world slowly and rarely can be rushed. This does mean many Treants can be perfectionists and prefer things to be just right than cut corners. Despite their size and power, many Treants are quite gentle and kind to others. Many have come to compare them to kindly grandparents. Also, the longest lived among the Verdanti, the Treants are often sought out for their wisdom and perspective on the differences from other times. While unpredictable, Treants eventually go into a catatonic like state yet remain alive like a normal tree. This is referred to as a Treant "setting down roots" both literally and metaphorically. Treants do not fear this state, knowing they are still alive, but instead believe they have become so old

or so experienced they no longer wish to interact with the world around them.

The second highest population among the Verdanti goes to the Mycerim. While they are more akin to mushrooms than other plants, Mycerim have developed a bit of a darker sense of humor and view on the world. While not morose, many Mycerim find the darker aspects of life bring them joy. Mycerim do not see death as evil, but instead find it beautiful. For them what many refer as filthy or unclean, the Mycerim are regarded as beautiful and delightful. While often garbed in funerary garb or in symbols of death and rot, Mycerim are bubbly to be such creatures. Many find them to be a little unnerving to spend time around, however, the Mycerim do share the Verdanti's joy of life, they see their place being closer to the end of the cycle of life melding over into rebirth. Some Mycerim can be morose and complicated, however, they are often in the minority compared to other Mycerim. Unlike other Verdanti, Mycerim thrive in dark places rather than the bright light of day.

Finally, the largest portion of the Verdanti populace are the Flora. Regarded as a catch all, Flora covers most forms of Verdanti like flowering, fruiting, or otherwise leafy Verdanti. Flora are colorful people who celebrate and exalt all forms of life and happiness. Some cynical folks consider many Flora naive, however, despite their relentless optimism, many Flora are resilient even in the harshest of times. It is not uncommon for Flora to try and raise the spirits of those around them no matter how dire a situation may be. Flora are known for cultivating farms or wild herbs which they treat with a tenderness almost as if they were raising children. Whether it is because they understand the plants they grow, or some other strange connection, many Flora have bountiful harvests almost every season. Some Flora are happy with a simple routine and would be just fine if each day was the same as the last so long as it is sunny and peaceful.

Culture

Verdanti have a vibrant and beautiful culture. Many enjoy reveling in the sun and wild places. Careful to only take what they need, Verdanti live in harmony with the world. While some have begun to see the need for getting supplies for the allies, many have taken to tending to the land in their own way to provide for others.

Verdanti are also known for nearly legendary patience in most cases. Their perception of time is certainly different from other species. For many Verdanti, they are more focused on the now than what has happened in the past. Days gone by mean little to them. This does make some Verdanti seem forgetful or oblivious, but it helps them stay focused on what needs done now rather than worrying about the past. A relentless cheerfulness bordering on irritating is a common trait among many Verdanti.

Making others smile is a reward all its own for many Verdanti and to this end quite a few have taken to performing or even organizing comedy routines even if

plant humor sometimes falls flat. Even when times are hard, a Verdanti will do what they can to make others smile.

While many Verdanti prefer pacifism, if necessary, they can and will take up arms to defend themselves or others. However, most Verdanti shine as healers, counselors, and caretakers. To this end many Verdanti often practice magics to help others rather than harm.

Music

Verdanti are fascinated with music, though they can speak and even sing, many Verdanti simply love to hear music as much as make it. Preferring music, which is lighthearted and whimsical, many Verdanti struggle to not tap their feet or hum along with songs.

Several have also been found doing much the same even when music is not playing. When asked what they were doing, the Verdanti often reply with something akin to "Listening to the music of the world".

Artwork

Verdanti favor artwork both to view and create which uses natural designs in creative ways. From simple weaves to paintings. Verdanti are also surprisingly fascinated by landscape paintings, as if they are excited to go there and meet the plants there.

Verdanti are not overly fond of woodwork, unless they can be sure the wood was reclaimed from an already dead tree. Many are very conscientious of respecting the land and using only the things which do not bring harm.

Verdanti Clothing

Verdanti prefer simple clothing made of natural materials, often made from plant materials rather than animal materials. Robes or wraps are the most common types of clothing worn by Flora. Many prefer them so they can sun themselves at a moment's notice. The cold can make many Verdanti desire more wraps or heavier robes as even they are more affected and often feel sluggish in the colder weather. While their clothing may appear primitive to other Species, many Verdanti do not care about fashion.

Language

Verdanti are said to hear the 'language of nature' however, they describe it less as actually hearing and more simply a sense of the world. Verdanti do sometimes struggle with language of other Species because many Verdanti can use their own form of sign language to communicate with each other. The gestures are often simple and highly specific to the group using them. Even other Verdanti sometimes struggle with the sign language of groups they are not familiar with personally. Some Verdanti scholars have been working towards creating a universal signing for the Verdanti, but so far it has not spread among the plant folk.

Hierarchy

Another concept most of the Verdanti have struggled with is hierarchies. For them they simply do not see the need. If they see someone in need, most Verdanti will simply step in and assist. At times this mindset is helpful on the small scale, but most Verdanti struggle with the idea of logistics for large groups such as an army or nation. While they can learn them, it requires them to go against much of what they grew up with in the humble Glades.

Military

If given the choice, most Verdanti would choose to do tasks and chores around a camp rather than be on the front line except for the Treants. While no Treant wants to fight, they know they can and will take a stand to protect their allies. There are times when this makes it difficult for folks even less able to fight want to assist in the efforts, however, Verdanti other than Treants will fight if necessary. Those who have seen combat often come back a little wilted and their cheerfulness has an edge to it few ever seen in the Verdanti. Many Verdanti veterans though rare, do still try to keep morale high, but even they can be worn down.

Heraldry

Most Verdanti see no point in heraldry preferring to be the symbol themselves. Others have adopted the plant or mushroom the Verdanti resembles as a personal device.

Yemanism

For as long as written history has existed for the Soli, they have worshiped El'Yemana and her daughter Celestia. These two figures are the most prominent in all of Yemanistic belief.

Yemanism holds to the belief that enlightenment is the key to becoming holy. Yemanism pushed its followers to expand their knowledge through study, research, prayer, and exploration. Many Yemanists are curious people who wish to always know more about the world around them, and all things within it and beyond. When the Soli found the road out of their homeland, they were excited to see what lay in the world beyond. However, their naivety ended in harsh realizations that the rest of the world is not nearly so enlightened or wise.

Yemanists believe when a crisis presents itself, they can count on El'Yemana or Celestia to give them a sign to guide them through their trials. The trials many Yemanists go through are looked at as teaching moments of the world. By experiencing things firsthand how difficult they can be, it will teach lessons people will never forget. Soli should then spread this knowledge to others to save them from the same hardships.

Many converts question why so many suffer under hardships across the world. Yemanist priests will almost all respond that the world is a large place and the lessons to be taught must come in many forms. The hardships of the world are to allow people to gain knowledge on their own or drive them to expand their knowledge. Many Yemanists claim once all knowledge has been revealed to them, they will be able to utilize the teachings of Yemanism to transform the world into a paradise.

The Yemanist Magni Opus

Part of Yemanism is the exaltation of Alchemy. Many of the Yemanist beliefs include references to Alchemical Formulae as allegory. The process for attaining perfection is called the Magni Opus. This great work has four steps used in relation to many parts of Soli life.

The first step is Nictredo or the Darkened Existence. Nictredo is associated with the color black, night, decomposition, putrefaction, and boiling ingredients until they are ready to be worked on. This process is often linked to the early days of Soli's expansion. They encountered great hardship through the first two expansion wars. Their ways had to be broken down and allowed to grow to become something more by combining their efforts. Nictredo is also believed to be a part of missionary work. Soli believe it to be a calling for only those with great emotional fortitude. Being a strange person in a strange land forces the missionary to confront the ignorance and foolishness of heathens. The missionary must break down their stubborn adherence to their old ways and bring them to the light. All of these things are in order to move along to the next stage of Albedo. Nictredo also is associated with birth, when a child is born, the world seems to be a sea of

chaos and confusion, but as they grow, they rise out of this dark time that few remember.

Aldo is the second stage of the Magni Opus which references purifying the collected mass from Nictredo. Aldo is believed to be the province of Priests of Yemanism. Once a soul converts it the next stage is to purify one's self of all previous impurities. This includes heathen beliefs, unsavory cultural practices, purifying the body and learning all one can. Many among Yemanism see Aldo as a time when both children and converts learn the ways of the faith and the dawn of understanding. Many look at their adolescence as the Aldo portion of their lives, where they are taught a great deal and then sent into adulthood clean and ready to apply what they have learned in theory. For many Aldo is the hardest part of the process to becoming something more. They are learning, but slowly and the process may take too long before they succumb to temptation. Aldo is believed to be a delicate and formative stage if not protected, can be easily perverted into something else. With untampered knowledge, the fertile mind can lead to undesirable results.

Citrinas is the third stage of the Magni Opus. The Alchemical process is linked to converting silver to gold or improving the worth of something through further processing. This is what many Yemanists believe to be adulthood in their lives or the midday when the sun is at its highest. Those who proceed into the Citrinas stage must take the theories they have learned during Aldo and now apply them to the world. This stage comes with the trials of life. At the Citrinas stage, the real work begins as the process of transmuting one substance to another of more value is not an easy one. Adulthood is rife with difficult choices and the loss of innocence. Citrinas is a time when theories are tested and how much of what was learned is put to use. Through this stage, the wisdom gained is likened to transforming lesser materials into gold. Theory is valuable, however, experience and proof is more valuable than a theory.

Rubedo is the final stage of life for the Yemanist. Likened to redness, the color red is regarded as a twilight color for the Yemanist. At this stage, gold has been created through alchemy. In turn this allegory represents an adult who has become wealthy in spirit, in mind, and in life. Rubedo is the attainment of goals after a long journey. This finished product is then able to utilize its full potential. As part of this, Yemanists believe this is the stage when one must become a teacher and pass on their knowledge to others. Sages, scholars, and the wise all find themselves wanting to leave behind great works or books, or teachings to know that they will live on in the hearts and minds of their people.

Virtues

Pride – Being proud of what you know is admirable. Being able to apply it to change the world is worth being proud. Yemanism encourages Pride within its adherents. No matter what action is taken.

Compassion – Few would be able to live without having been taught of the world. This compassion to teach and aid their fellow man is not a sin, in fact it is more of a virtue.

Some Soli believe there is a bit of a paradox between compassion and pride, so many choose to follow one or the other.

Curiosity – The Yemanist church believes curiosity is also a virtue. Their people should be eager to learn to continue through the cycle and assist others. A healthy curiosity will drive a Yemanist to gain more knowledge, to be endlessly interested in the world around them and the details of it.

Wisdom – Those who have been through so much are regarded as sages and holy men even if they do not directly serve the church. Wisdom is a trait above all others which should be respected. Wise counsel is considered to always be virtuous.

Temperance – Yemanists believe pleasure should be derived from a place of study and enlightenment. Physical pleasure is base and more likely to distract the mind from pursuit of knowledge. Yemanists preach moderation in all things, often going so far as to suggest abstaining from intoxication, meat, or pleasures of the flesh for anything but procreation.

Holy Texts

The Liber Illiistrat, or Book of Enlightenment in the loosest translation, is the holy text of Yemanism. Within The Illiistrat's sacred pages are stories and history of the Soli and El'Yemana's relationship. The text has dozens of stories of El'Yemana as she developed the secret of alchemy. This section is known as the Antea Texts, many of the stories talk of fantastic accomplishments of El'Yemana until she created the Soli and blessed them with safeguarding her mortal offspring. Since then, the Exim Texts have catalogued Celestia's rule and the teachings she has offered her chosen people.

The Illiistrat is believed to be a living work evolving and being written as Celestia reveals more knowledge to the world. There are other portions of this scripture devoted to war, science, alchemy, artifice, architecture and any other subject one can imagine. The Illiistrat in its entirety takes up hundreds of shelves. Other sections have their own names such as the Illiistrat Bellicus for military tactics, Illiistrat Cultios for agriculture, Illiistrat Minerva for weaving, Illiistrat Sapientia for philosophy and many others.

Every decade, any significant additions to the Illiustrat are distributed to the parishes and then expected to be shared with the flocks of believers.

Iconography

The Yemanist Faith is typically represented by a sunburst, a circular form with points radiating from it. Images of El'Yemana all wear a veil or have hair covering her face. Most artists are scorned for trying to depict the face of a Goddess being almost taboo to do so, even in jest. Celestia on the other hand has her likeness immortalized across the empire. Illuminations of Celestia are always depicted clearly and openly hiding no part of the child's face. Many feel since they have Celestia to guide them, why should she be hidden, people should celebrate her glory.

The Colors of Yemanism represent the four stages of the Magni Opus. Black, White, Reds and Yellows are all common colors among the Yemanist faithful. Black representing a culmination of all things brought together in preparation for great things. Many craftsmen typically wear black clothing to denote the potential they can bring out of the world. White is a sign of purity and chastity often worn by the young and those of the Yemanist faith. Yellows are one of the more common colors worn by adults and those who trade and work the fields. Red is most typically worn by leaders of the clergy, alchemists, and artificers. This represents their closeness to the Goddess. These colors are usually prominent, but not mandatory.

Yemanist soldiers typically will wear a red and black sash or head band to denote their faith. Sunburst emblems are also common when possible. Since they represent the difference between the Rubedo of life and the Nigredo of death, the colors are deemed appropriate.

A few very talented artists have begun creating locketts or small tokens with a portrait of Celestia. These items tend to be valuable, and a few are even a special kind of picture box allowing them to look inside and behold Celestia in all her glory.

Laws of Yemanism

The Laws of Yemanism are strict and unforgiving. Many Yemanists follow them simply because they don't wish to be banished.

Pursue Knowledge in All Things

El'Yemana's teachings promote her adherents learning all they can when they can. Adherence to this law varies based on means and access to knowledge. Some believe this to mean they must go and experience life to its fullest, many Yemanist adventurers use this law as their reason for expeditions. Others take this to mean they must study constantly, expand their horizons across all pursuits of knowledge. And yet others believe in seeking the wisdom in everyday life, understanding the small nuances of what happens around them. Yet other Yemanists use this law to be nosy and keep close watch on their neighbors for signs of blasphemy.

Refusing the Wisdom of the Goddess is Sacrilege.

Yemanists who refuse to learn and gain knowledge are considered dissenters and must be taught the error of their ways. Other Yemanists may teach the willful individual in any way they choose so long as it does not result in death. Other examples of breaking this law are being an adult unable to read, refusing to attend school or university without special dispensation, refusing to listen to the advice of someone wiser, or ignoring the warnings of the clergy, artificers' guild, or Alchemical College.

Be not tempted by accursed powers

Working with those who bind themselves to creatures from other worlds for power or knowledge only used for spreading fear, darkness, and ignorance is a sin of the

highest magnitude. This includes Necromancers, Infernalists, Psions, Enchanters, Druids, Shaman and any other tradition of magic which draws its power from worlds other than Tenebrar or El'Yemana's light. Associating with these types willingly is a lower form of blasphemy, however a Yemanists who do this are considered among the highest orders of heretics.

Destroying Knowledge is akin to Harming the Goddess

Yemanists believe knowledge to be the most important thing above all. Any true Yemanist is loath to see knowledge lost or destroyed. Book burning, murdering a wise man or sage is a deadly sin. Destroying a library is crime enough to be hunted in the streets even by lowly commoners.

Do not be distracted from your pursuit by food, drink, or flesh.

Many Yemanists, while not completely devoid of decadence, do refrain from allowing it to become excessive. Debauchery to the point of addiction or being out of control is the ultimate sign of foolishness to a Yemanist. These faithful look down on decadence which results in heavy intoxication or harm to others preventing them from learning more. Dulling the mind with such intoxicants is considered low and weak. Only those unable to embrace the trials the Goddess sends will debase themselves with too much food, drink, flesh, or other pleasure.

All That is Good May be Done in the Goddess's Light

Yemanists believe anything that requires being done in the dark of night is a sin against El'Yemana. As part of the teachings of their goddess, keeping too many secrets is dangerous and ultimately a sin against their goddess. That is not to say many Soli who do keep secrets rationalize it as, others are not ready for this knowledge which could bring more chaos than good until the time is right.

Nighttime is believed to be the time that evil forces are at their prime while El'Yemana rests for the coming day. Yemanists prefer to be near a source of light or at the very least in doors. Many Yemanists have gestures to repel evil spirits at night. Many carry a lantern or candle or other source of light. If none is available, few Yemanists will leave some place they feel is safe.

When Life fades, what remains is unclean.

That which is dead is unclean. Corpses are considered unclean as they no longer have the light illuminating their eyes. This taboo varies wildly. It does contribute to the large portion of the Yemanist clergy who are vegetarian eating only fruit and vegetables and refuse to wear leather, while others simply believe that this taboo is in relation to things such as the undead and when they will arise.

Respect Knowledge and the Trials Suffered to Find it.

Places of learning, such as schools or libraries are considered holy ground. Many of these places undergo the

same rites as a temple. Yemanists believe these places are houses of worship in addition to centers for learning. Yemanists will be reverent in such places and scorn anyone who would be obnoxious or loud within such places. Many Yemanists are taught to leave arms and armor behind within a school and that blood shed within such a place is a way to ensure that your soul is cast into the flames of the Crucible.

Created with Love by the Goddess, the Body is a Masterpiece.

Yemanists believe their bodies were fashioned by their goddess herself. Due to this they exalt the physical form, but in an artistic sense rather than a sexual sense. Nudity is common, but not looked at as crude or rude. Those who lust after the bodies of others are seen as base and wishing to pervert something sacred. Body modifications are abominations, scars are marks of great shame and guilt, and birth marks are considered signs of misfortune. Many other cultures ask then, why are there so many misshapen or ugly. Any Yemanist will reply that something twisted them whether the mother was a heathen, someone in the family consorted with other powers, or as a trial to teach someone a lesson. Some also suggest the ones who are infirm may have been pulled out of the fires of the Crucible too soon or had some defect hidden deep inside them.

Yemanist Thaumaturgy

Yemanists believe their people pioneered the field of Thaumaturgy and brought it to the world. While Thaumaturgy has existed in the world for as long as any records show, the Yemanists did categorize the Aspects of the Divine in the *Compendium Divinicus*.

Yemanist Thaumaturges generally follow the Aspects of the Divine listed below:

Crafters/Metal
Day/Light/Sun
Justice/Law/Order
Knowledge/Philosophy/Secrets
Nobility/Rulership

These Aspects are attributed to El'Yemana and by extension Celestia.

Moonsong

Practiced primarily among those residing in the country of Erce, Moonsong is focused on the individual finding their place in the natural cycle of the world. However, for each group of people Moonsong works differently for them but shares many similar concepts. We will focus on the similarities rather than the differences. Unlike Yemanism, there is no sole authority for how Moonsong is followed. Within each group of Moonsong followers a single person is chosen as the Moonsinger. How this choice is made is up to the group of followers and at times there may be several individuals chosen to lead a gathering of Moonsong followers. Some groups may choose a more democratic way of choosing someone who embodies the virtues of Moonsong while others may choose through trial by combat or other more esoteric methods such as who can seek out some new wisdom to teach to their followers.

Regardless of how a Moonsinger is chosen, they provide guidance, solace, and counsel to their followers rather than directly lead them. Moonsingers are viewed as teachers and mentors more than leaders. A new Moonsinger may only be chosen with each new cycle of the moon beginning with the new moon.

Moonsong views the moon as their guiding principle, believing that change is as inevitable as it is predictable. Though the moon goes by many names among the faithful, all Moonsong followers know the Moon looks down on the world with joy and love for her children. The Song is the harmony of life each living creature brings to the world which in turn is pleasing to the Moon. A common story among the Moonsong is the phases of the moon are when the Moon Goddess is turning her face to watch different parts of the world. Unlike other faiths the Moon Goddess is not omnipotent and must turn her attention to various parts of the world as time goes on. She is patient and provides her attention evenly among the world below her.

The daytime is when the Moon Goddess has gone to rest or has gone far away to watch lands much farther than a person could walk in a day's time. The sun is believed to be a strict and often judgmental fatherly figure by many groups, glaring down on them to ensure they are behaving themselves and continuing the cycle of life. It is said the Sun God created plants and the green of the world, while the Moon was responsible for the animals and people. To care for their children, both beings take a portion of the day to watch over their children.

For a Moonsong follower each goes through a cycle of change and must prepare for it because many things are fleeting but cycles will always be renewed. To this end many Moonsong followers have minimalist views on their lives often only keeping things necessary for them to continue on through their life. Shelter, tools, food, medicine are all viewed as necessary to continue the cycle of life. Most Moonsong followers view the things other nations find valuable as frivolous or useless. For example, many Moonsong followers would rather barter than trade in coin,

but some have come to understand others do not accept barter and seek coin instead so they use it only as necessary.

This plays into one of the core beliefs of Moonsong is finding harmony with nature and all living things. Moonsong followers believe they are one piece of the vast network of life across the world and it is more of a sin to take from that world unless it is to sustain them or their kin. Vanity, greed, and a disregard for life are among the greatest sins one can commit. Much like plants and animals, they wish to leave as small a mark on the world as possible in order to please the Moon Goddess with the natural beauty of the world.

The Moon Cycle

The New Moon is when she is watching somewhere far away and has turned her attention from the lands. As her face grows fuller, her attention is being turned onto the places it sees. Among the Moonsong, the new moon is a time for doing what must be done using the darkness to take care of problems and sort out dangerous issues. It is common for Moonsong followers to do battle with their enemies under the cover of night. By the time the focus of the Moon Goddess is turned back to that area, signs of fighting will have faded, and the cycle continues. Some more critical members of the Song believe the New Moon is the best time to do things which may be shameful or displeasing to the Moon Goddess but know they must be done to keep the cycle on track.

During the First Quarter Moon or the Facing Moon is a time of contemplation and preparation. It is seen as a time to prepare for the rising of the full moon. Many followers of the faith will plan what they will be doing in the coming weeks and discuss matters of importance to restore harmony among the believers. A great deal of work is usually done during this time. Additionally, during the First Quarter Moon is a time to settle matters in a more civilized way. Many times, disputes are settled, and negotiations are had. During this time Moonsingers from different groups may gather to try and find compromises to ensure all involved thrive in times of difficulty or seek aid from other nearby groups.

When the Full Moon rises, she is paying close attention to that part of the world. During the Full Moon, many among the Moonsong believe they must adhere to their faith to the letter and in doing so please the Moon Goddess. Though only a few days, the Full Moon is considered a sacred time when followers of Moonsong should pray, worship, and carry out important rituals for their faith.

During the Half Moon, or Turning Moon, members of Moonsong focus on finding their balance within themselves. This is considered a deeply personal time when members of the faith should focus on their own self-improvement and how to come to terms with their faults, failures, and troubles. It is a time for penance and introspection.

Virtues

Humility - Moonsong believers find humility is necessary to maintain their minimalist lifestyles and to not take more than they need from the land. As such ego is often viewed as a road to vanity, greed, and overindulgence which in turn makes the person disgraceful in the eyes of the moon.

Community - Many members of Moonsong look at all life as their siblings or at least distant cousins. It is important to work together and do what you must to protect your kin. Even when times are hard and they must hunt to survive, they offer thanks to the spirits of those taken to preserve the group.

Acceptance - To the Moonsong all are welcome so long as they can give up materialistic desires and embrace the ideals of the faith. People who might not be 'proper' in other societies are welcome to bring their experience and wisdom to the Moon. Regardless of skin or hair color, species such as Therios, Verdanti, and Fae, ability, or identity, all are welcome and should be celebrated for their individuality.

Introspection - The teachings of Moonsong focus on being able to look inward and identify the thoughts and feelings which lead to the decisions of each person. Followers of Moonsong must look within themselves and find the root of their struggles and recognize when they should rely on their community to help them grow and continue in the great cycle.

Compromise - Despite celebrating the individual, compromise is necessary to ensure the community survives. Many Moonsong followers believe compromise is the key to preserving their community and faith even during times of hardship. Even if it means taking the life of another if it would mean the community survives.

Preservation - Each member of Moonsong is passionate about preserving the natural world as best as possible. While they can build homes and villages, they should seek to do it in the least destructive ways possible to the natural world. Using techniques to incorporate their homes and needs into the landscape is the ideal many of them strive to accomplish.

Holy Texts

Many Moonsong communities do not keep holy texts, but often keep an oral history and record of their community which is shared during the full moon to ensure their people know of their forebears and the wisdom of the elders. While those not of the faith have tried to record them, there are so many different oral histories it has become hard to call any single one a complete record or true definitive text.

Iconography

Most Moonsong believers wear symbols representing the moon or music to show their belief. The most common is known as the Moon Sigil. Most examples of the Moon Sigil are a white or lightly colored Ring worn around the neck or

otherwise attached to their clothing. These rings are usually made of wood, bone, or stone. A Moon Sigil made of metal is believed to be a sign of arrogance. Variations of the Moon Sigil are common, some are simple rings while others are more elaborate including carvings or markings of natural objects such as animals or plants.

Laws of Moonsong

Though these vary group to group, the most common Laws are as follows.

Take only when you must

Moonsong followers believe materials, food, and even taking lives should only be done to survive. Living a slightly more difficult life due to a minimalist lifestyle is worth preserving the natural beauty of the world for the Moon Goddess. Some more aggressive minded members of the faith use this to justify aggressive action saying it must be done for the good of the community. These disputes are often settled during the Facing Moon.

Live in Harmony with Nature

Moonsong traditions always follow some form of treating Nature with respect and reverence. Most Moonsong camps are clean and have as little impact as possible on the land. Most of their people will hunt, gather and farm only as much as they need to get by.

Embrace difficulties as teaching moments.

Each moment of struggle or difficulty is seen as a moment to grow and learn about yourself and the world around you. In the moment it may be hard to see what lesson is being taught, but with introspection in the future, believers should seek what they can learn from those difficult times.

The Cycle must be preserved

To the Moonsong life and death are simply parts of the greater cycle of the world. Things are born, grow, and die. At times other living things must die to let others survive, but it keeps the greater cycle moving. Things outside the cycle such as Spirits, Undead, Demons, Sylvagore, and other monsters are dangerous and cannot be allowed to pervert the cycle and continue to take from it. At times even other living creatures may need to be killed to prevent over-predation or exploitation of Nature.

Even in death, we live on in the world around us.

Death is not to be feared but seen as a time when the members of the faith pass on into Nature and become a part of the cycle. As their body decays, they become food for other beings and nourish Nature. Each of them becomes a part of so many lives from birth to death and that living memory will be carried on as long as the cycle continues.

Our Kin are our Charge

Family both, blood and extended, are responsible for taking care of their members and helping them when able. However, it does not mean one person must do it all themselves and should seek help from their community when they can.

Moonsong Thaumaturgy

Moonsong Thaumaturgy is generally seen becoming an agent of the Moon to look provide wisdom and guidance to those of the faith. Many take up the tasks of healers and scouts to help their people thrive.

Moonsong Thaumaturges generally follow the Aspects of the Divine listed below:

Beast/Hunting
Darkness/Night/Shadow
Forest/Nature
Harvest/Life/Medicine
Family/Friendship/Love/Protection
Art/Joy/Music/Pleasure

Rohari

Founded by the Gethral and formalized after their people were freed from demonic slavery, the Rohari believe every person is free to live as they please so long as they are not hurting others. Central to the faith is the legend of Merrax, the Gethral who rose from the ranks of slaves and led a rebellion against the demons oppressing his people. While not all members of the Rohari believe Merrax is a god, some have begun whispering that only a god could have freed them from the centuries of imprisonment. Known as the Chainbreaker, the Ashen Axe, and the Fireheart, many within the faith revere Merrax as their savior.

Following in the ideals of Merrax, the Rohari believe people must accept others as they are without putting pressure on them to conform or change themselves to fit another's ideals. The Rohari believe any form of slavery, oppression, and conformity is a sin against their faith. At the core of the faith is the ideal of live and let live. Rohari encourage each other, and others, to explore who they are as a person and to do what they must to live a life they are proud of no matter how frightening it may feel. Many Rohari develop a fierce sense of independence and family because they must prove themselves. No one is forced to do the work for others, instead the Rohari preach each person must travel their own path. This is not to say the person cannot ask for help along their journey, but they must have the courage to ask. To tie or chain up a Gethral against their will is a great evil and many Rohari will immediately become violent to prevent it.

While other faiths and people sometimes see the Rohari as cold, often simply standing by if they are not asked for help, to the Rohari, this is allowing others to find their own voice, feet, or courage to overcome obstacles. Pride is a complicated issue among the Rohari, while one should be proud of their own accomplishments, they should never be too prideful to suffer needlessly. This belief comes partly from the need to survive in a harsh landscape the Gethral call home, but also to ensure the survival of all who want to work together. Within the wastelands, people must work together, or else entire villages can be lost overnight. When pride becomes too great to seek help with their problems, the Rohari see no need to help. To them, the struggle must either be overcome alone giving the person a sense of strength or they must seek help when a problem is too big to ensure they can surpass it.

After the Gethral broke their chains, there were many who began following shamanic traditions which are said to have survived since before the demons enslaved them. Many Rohari believe everything has a living spirit which manifests in this world. Even their captors were merely spirits feeding off their pain to sustain their mortal forms. Each spirit has their own personality, agenda, and beliefs like any living creature. Many Rohari will choose a spirit as their personal crest and seek to emulate the spirit as an expression of who they are. Some villages of Rohari may represent themselves with an animal, a force of nature, or even concepts as their markings. These groups do not claim to own these patrons, but instead try to live their lives to the

ideals they attribute to such forces. The Rohari do not pray as other faiths do, to the Rohari their actions are their prayers. By living their lives upholding their own ideals they offer praise and worship to the spirits and Merrax.

Unlike other faiths, there is no central leadership or clergy. Each person is expected to have their own interpretation of the faith and so long as they uphold the core ideals, then they are a faithful Rohari. Some do seek guidance from others they respect, talking about the faith and what it means to each other is common practice to help educate and encourage newer members. Though there is little structure, the Rohari find this to be preferable than the strict doctrines of other faiths such as Yemanism. Usually someone who is respected for their integrity or connection to the spirits may be sought out to teach others of the faith. This is seen as a sign of honor and nobility to have others seek you out to learn how to become a better member of the faith.

When it comes to family, the Rohari also do not have a religious practice associated with marriage. During the enslavement of the Gethral, the demonic overlords would move those who showed close affections with each other and move them to other pens rather than allow the Gethral any reprieve. For many this became a time of finding love and comfort where they could since the next day, they may never see their partners again. This continued in the Rohari beliefs. Many Rohari find marriage is a form of constraining someone and demanding they only find comfort in one person. Any form of sexuality or gender is embraced and accepted among followers of the Rohari. As such it is not uncommon for non-traditional relationships to form among the Rohari. With the focus on living their best life, the Rohari feel it is only right to not constrain their feelings to one person unless that is their choice. Monogamous relationships do exist but are generally less common than non-traditional relationships.

The Raxis'Korbal

Among the Rohari it is said there is a group known only as the Raxis'Korbal who have been studying magic associated with demons to combat them. Some say these are the same people who caused the Daemontide in the first place when times were getting desperate during the 5th Expansion War. By Rohari beliefs, this is impossible because Blood Magic is forbidden due to its connection with demons. However, the rumors and whispers still travel. The Rohari denounce these rumors saying it goes against the core of their beliefs in forcing something or someone into servitude.

As far as anyone knows the Raxis'Korbal do not carry any form of insignia or acknowledge they are members. Anyone claiming to be Raxis'Korbal is often laughed at among the Rohari for trying to be part of some mythical group. While some may admit being prepared to fight back against their greatest enemies may be a wise idea, to do so in the ways suggested practiced by the Raxis'Korbal would lead to damnation and simply becoming another oppressor.

Virtues of Rohari

Bravery - The Rohari believe every one of their followers should have the courage and bravery to face down any challenge. Fear is not scorned unless it is allowed to rule a person's life. The wisest Rohari knows all courage comes from conquering their fears.

Acceptance - The Rohari believe people should accept others for who they are, so long as their actions do not harm others. However, should the actions of another bring harm to a Rohari, they are allowed to respond however they wish. The Rohari believe differences should be embraced to better their society and help them grow.

Personal Accountability - Each member of the Rohari is expected to take responsibility for their actions and must deal with the consequences. While a person is free to choose how they act, they must own their behavior and how it affects others.

Perseverance - Being able to overcome obstacles or seek the help to do so are regarded as a virtue in the Rohari. There is no shame in asking for help, however, forcing help on another is oppressive. If a person cannot persevere on their own, they must ask for the help they need otherwise a believer must leave them to their own devices.

Comradery - Gathering a collection of likeminded folk is important to the faith, no one should be alone if it can be helped. Unless someone proves themselves untrustworthy or dangerous, all peoples are friends you simply have not met yet.

Creativity - Many among the faith are encouraged to follow their creative sparks whether it be for art, music, dancing, or any other creative pursuit.

Compassion - There are many evils in the world, the Rohari should not add to them. All people are walking their own paths, they should be treated with compassion until they arrive where they want to be. It is up to the Rohari to aid this journey when their assistance is requested.

Holy Texts

The Rohari do not claim any holy text, instead many of their teachings are passed on from one person to the next.

Iconography

Most Rohari use a symbol of a path leading to the horizon as a symbol of their faith. This is called the Path of Merrax. It symbolizes the journey each member takes to being true to themselves. Oftentimes this will be incorporated with the symbols of any spirits the individual sees as their patron. This symbol may be worn as a simple design on their clothing, stamped on their equipment or jewelry.

Laws of the Rohari

Help those who ask, await those too proud to ask

Desert/Fire/Heat
Family/Friendship/Love/Protection
Fury/Hatred/Vengeance

Having the humility to ask for help should be praised. Unless asked, let others seek their own path. Do not coddle another or interfere in their growth, but do not refuse them help if they have the strength to ask unless you are unable to help.

Seek your inner and best self

Each of us must understand our own self before we can truly understand others. Along your journey, look inward and seek out who you are, why you do what you do, and if it is truly what is best for your life. Become the best version of yourself you can.

Live life to the fullest

Each day we must find what makes our hearts and souls light and joyful. Pursue what will make you happy no matter the obstacles but remember to do no harm unless you must protect yourself or your loved ones.

Drive out the demon

It is the charge of all Rohari to thwart the plans of demons no matter the personal cost. Given the chance they will enslave and torment us for the remainder of our lives. They may deceive, threaten, or harm you, but it is your duty as Rohari to drive them from the mortal planes.

Be not bound by oppression

The chains of oppression must be broken. Suffer not the slaver, the oppressor, or the captor. Seek to free yourself, your family, and anyone who is bound not by their own hand. Whether the chains be physical, societal, or magical, do everything within your power to break free of such bonds.

Honor your word

In becoming your best, you must uphold your word. Be careful who you give your word lest you be taken advantage of by those with ill intent.

Rohari Thaumaturgy

Rohari have a somewhat complicated relationship with Thaumaturgy. Many Rohari Thaumaturges find they embody the concepts of Rohari however, some of the Aspects they follow have their drawbacks.

Rohari Thaumaturges generally follow the Aspects of the Divine listed below:

Art/Joy/Music/Pleasure
Champions/Combat/War
Chaos/Discord

Sigrun

Primarily practiced by the Dwearn, Sigrun is a faith about appeasing and carrying on the traditions of one's family through ancestor worship. In this regard, many Dwearn feel it is important to have a history of their people, especially since the Mad King's Fall cut off many Dwearnian Kingdoms from one another. First and foremost, within Sigrun are the Family Traditions. The teachings of Sigrun say each family is the rock in which society and life is based on. Without family, there is only chaos and disorder. Each family is given freedom to choose their own traditions within the teachings of Sigrun but must uphold tradition unless a prominent member can surpass the ancestor who initially laid down the original tradition. For this reason, each family has a Lengibuk, or Book of the Line. Within this book, a Sigrun family records their family's story and deeds. Each member of the family is given 1 page initially but may add pages as their story gets longer. Depending on how prominent or influential the life of a family member is usually determining how much detail is recorded. Some Dwearn never even fill up their one page. Despite what some young folk may think, this is not a journal for their private thoughts, instead it is meant as a record of their deeds, accomplishments and even failures.

If a Dwearn wishes to change a family tradition entirely, they must first prove to the current living members of the family they have surpassed the ancestor who set down the tradition. Many clever Dwearn instead decide to 'creatively interpret' the traditions and slowly over time change them until the family always does things a different way. For the longest time, Dwearn never expected Sigrun would catch on with other species, however, as it turns out the Gethral and even several Agrineans before Hektram's Folly had begun to adopt the teachings of Sigrun. For the Gethral, it touched on a more shamanic revival amongst their people. Within the teachings and rituals of Sigrun, it is possible to speak with the spirits of the ancestors. Some outsiders to the faith have labeled this as witchcraft or dark magic. While there are certainly some aspects of Sigrun rituals which speak with the dead, the only dangers of such rituals is if the wrong ancestors are allowed to pass into the world of the living. It is believed the Lengibuk traps or creates a memory of the family member and allows the living to speak with this simulacra.

Even members of a family who turn to evil, corruption, or fall out of favor have their deeds recorded as a cautionary tale. Such ancestors often become Ancestral Shades, vicious angry spirits who seek to punish the living of their species. Some have tried to remove records of ancestors which have shamed the family, but this inevitably causes the manifestation of an Ancestral Shade. It is taboo to try to remove the pages of a family member or to write falsehoods about the family member simply to make them appear greater than they were. Doing so is heresy to strict orthodox Sigrunists. It has become mildly more acceptable among less devoted followers of the faith.

The Lines and Hierarchy of the Ancestors

Within each Lengibuk, the ancestors are arranged in a hierarchy strictly based on their deeds. For some families with long and noble histories, each of these heroes becomes a prominent figure in the Family's beliefs. For example, if an ancestor was known for their skill in battle, during times of conflict family members may pray to that ancestor for strength and guidance. Other ancestors known for being good diplomats become a patron of negotiation, good conduct, or patience. Sigrun beliefs can mirror monotheistic or polytheistic practices depending on how long the history of the family is or how daring their members are. More monotheistic Sigrun families may trace their faith back to the family founder and lift them up to be their guide in matters of importance.

When a Sigrunist passes away, the funeral ceremony is regarded as a happy if bittersweet time. For the Sigrunist, when a family member passes it is a time to reflect on their life, to finish out their pages in the family Lengibuk and celebrate their ascension into the halls of their ancestors. When possible, the ceremony usually involves a great deal of pomp and circumstance along with feasts and drinking. After the pages of the Lengibuk are filled for the recently deceased, the surviving family must weigh their actions against others within their line. Each member of the family is assigned a station within the Lengibuk. Folk who lead mundane lives are relegated to the Hall of Gathering. The Hall serves as a grand meeting place where members of the family all may converse, play, and feast to their heart's content.

More prominent figures in the family's history are assigned to the Eternal Watch. This station is for those who at great expense to themselves protected the family against all odds. The Eternal Watch is a place for protectors of the family. When not within the Hall of Gathering, they must keep watch over their family to ensure their prosperity for generations to come. Another station within the afterlife is the Halls of Remembrance. This unique station is for family members who did something great or terrible for the family. Other theologians have compared this to a hall of Saints and Villains. Many Sigrunists look at those positioned in the Hall of Remembrance as their greatest victories and worst defeats. Many Sigrunists use the sainted ancestors' names for blessings and the villainous family member's names as parts of curses. The final common station is the Halls of the Eldest. While not associated with the age of the ancestor, the Halls of the Eldest is the highest station for any Sigrunist. These family members were the most influential in the family's history. The Founder of a family is typically found within the Halls of the Elders and other famous members of the family.

A common game played among Sigrunist children is taking on the roles of the ancestors and having them interact with one another, retelling the stories from the family Lengibuk. During feasts and other important events, Sigrunists will tell stories of their ancestors to teach lessons or give hope to their comrades.

In the case the family grows, through marriage with another family, there are some important choices to be made. The newlyweds must decide if they will stay with one of the families primarily or begin their own Lengibuk. Typically, in larger Sigrun families, the newlyweds are persuaded or even coerced into staying with one of the families thus adding to their Lengibuk. If a member of a Sigrun leaves the lineage, their pages are copied from the Lengibuk and provided to the new family. Though there is an exception to this when the couple wishes to start their own Lengibuk. This process requires permission from their family elders to begin an entirely new family. While there is often a lot of posturing and attempts to keep the family united, if the newlyweds are adamant, elders will typically give their blessing and a new Sigrunist family is formed.

These extended families have less say in the running of a primary Sigrunist family, however, their major accomplishments are still recorded in the primary family's Lengibuk ensuring they find a place in the halls of the ancestors.

Virtues

Family - Sigrun is focused on family. Despite their shortcomings, Sigrunists must try to reconcile with their family. If reconciliation is not possible, then the family splits which is looked down upon, but not taboo. When such splits happen, a new Lengibuk must be started with the member who could not reconcile with the greater part of the family.

Honor - Sigrunists are expected to uphold the honor of their family and line to the best of their abilities. Every action they take, should be taken towards honoring those who came before them. With the variety of families following Sigrun, this virtue is expressed in numerous and sometimes odd ways.

Dedication - Sigrunists are expected to dedicate their lives to expanding the family's line and story. Whether through supporting the family, doing notable things, or simply by taking care of other members when they have difficult times.

Acceptance - Sigrunists who can accept their family for who they are is considered one of their noble virtues. Even if that family member strays from tradition or makes a mistake, Sigrunists are encouraged to accept it and celebrate the new branches of the family. This virtue also applies to accepting other families and people may have different beliefs than they do, however, so long as peace is maintained, a Sigrunist allows others to go about their business without interfering.

Growth - Sigrunists believe they must grow and expand their family. When a person is inducted into Sigrun, it is seen as an adoption but they are welcomed into the family. There is some debate among Sigrunist factions on whether or not this is open to people with a different species from the core of the family. Some believe it is not

and goes against the ideals of family, but there are sects out there who believe anyone is welcome into the family.

Preservation - History is important to the Sigrun. For them the Lengibuk is a sacred relic and to them their faith is based around. One of the most important parts of the faith is ensuring the Lengibuk is preserved at all costs. Even if the family is wiped out, they can live on as long as their Lengibuk is preserved.

Holy Texts

Sigrunists believe the Lengibuk is the center of their faith and how they can remember, honor, and protect their family. Lengibuks are rarely ever copied, however, if the Lengibuk is damaged or grows beyond its bindings over time, the current family may copy the Lengibuk into a new volume. Some ancient families may have several volumes related to their family kept in a shrine within the family's home.

Lengibuks come in many shapes and sizes. Wealthy families will often have their Lengibuks etched into metal or wooden pages, or even have their Lengibuk etched into the walls of their family estate. Some snobbish Sigrunists may judge the cover of a family's Lengibuk, but only ever in private.

Destruction of a Lengibuk is considered the gravest sin a Sigrunist can do. It is viewed as a form of spiritual genocide. If a Lengibuk is destroyed and no one can record the stories, to a Sigrunist the souls of those ancestors cease to be and are lost to oblivion. Stories speak of ancestral shades who would hunt down those who destroyed their family's Lengibuk before being drawn away into oblivion.

Iconography

Sigrun iconography is often deeply personal and tied to the family's device or crest. The choice of the symbol is often bears scrolls, books, tablets, or other symbols for written work along with any other symbols to represent the family. Many Sigrun Families wear their family crest with pride. Asking a Sigrunist to cover or not wear their family crest is a grave insult. The only time it is acceptable is in life-or-death situations and even then it is still something most Sigrunists would rather not do.

Laws of Sigrun

Family First

To the Sigrunist their family comes first in all matters. It is forbidden for a faithful Sigrunist to betray their family. Without our family, we are at risk of losing everything to the thieves and conquerors beyond. Your family is your strength. Sigrunists should carry themselves in an honorable fashion which brings glory, honor, and praise to the family. Embrace the things the family finds important and let no one insult your kin.

Do not interfere in matters of other families

Other families must sort their own business from within. It is foolish to think you can interfere in the matters of other families. If another family requests help, then you may aid, but do not be arrogant enough to think you know what is best for other families.

Follow the Ancestors Traditions, unless you surpass them

Sigrunists may lay down traditions for their families, but these traditions may be overturned or modified by those who have been deemed to surpass the ancestor who laid down the tradition. If a Tradition is to be challenged, the members of the family must give their blessing on whether the challenging family member has surpassed the ancestor who laid down the tradition. Two thirds or more of the family must agree to this. Only who have reached physical maturity may present their vote on these matters.

Hall, Home and Hearth

Set down your roots so your family can prosper. Each family should have a home where the eldest gather and take care of the family. An ancestral family home is essential for future generations. Should this home be taken, it is the duty of the family to retake it. This home reflects the Halls of the Ancestors. The living family should do their best to maintain and protect it for the sake of those who came before.

Guard the Lengibuk

If times are dire, it is imperative the Lengibuk is protected. Even a sin such as abandoning the family can be forgiven if it means the Lengibuk is protected and kept safe. Without the Lengibuk, all the ancestors are lost to oblivion and the family line vanishes for eternity.

Sigrun Thaumaturgy

Often regarded as the guardians and caretakers of the Lengibuk, Sigrun Thaumaturges are expected to play a pivotal role in the faith. They must watch over the Lengibuk and protect it. Failing to do so is one of the greatest dishonors a Sigrunist Thaumaturge can commit.

Sigrunist Thaumaturges generally follow the Aspects of the Divine listed below:

Crafters/Metal
Earth/Mountains/Subterranean
Family/Friendship/Love/Protection
Justice/Law/Order
Champions/Combat/War

Minor Faiths and Cults of Anthuli

There are dozens of minor faiths and cults which have sprung up over the centuries, few have ever achieved more than a few hundred members across the continent. Many are confined to a region and do not spread for one reason or another. Many of the Minor Faiths and Cults have sprung up after the 5th Expansion War trying to gain a foothold within Graewynn and attract a following. Some have been more successful than others, but the common folk are seeking some answer to their concerns or some semblance of safety among other like minded individuals.

Ravening Maw

Originating from the Ravenous Sea in the south, the Ravening Maw is a cult devoted to the Great Maw. Comprised almost exclusively of Therios from Kuh'nal, they embrace their vicious hunger and find they must feed on other beings. The teachings of the Ravening Maw include consuming those who will not sate their most primal desire, hunger, with the flesh of others.

The followers of the Ravening Maw are mostly Aquatic Therios with the ability to eat other creatures. However, there are rumors of this cult gaining ground in the southlands of Agrineas and Erce. Some say even Mortaeans have begun to band together with these Therios and hunt those outside their faith.

The Primalis

Another minor faith originating from the Therios is the Primalis. Some among the Therios believe their connection to the beastkin is something every Therios should worship and attempt to mirror their beastkin. The Primalis themselves are described as gargantuan dire beasts, each one an originator of a species of animal. For example, the Bjorg, or the First Bear, is the first bear species. Though these followings are small, many Primalis followers are fanatics to the idea of living simple lives closer to nature and embracing their relationship with the beastkin rather than the civilized aspects of society.

Rumors have spread many Therios following the Primalis have subjected themselves to something referred to as the Dire Affliction in an attempt to become more like the Primalis, however, the isolated nature of many Primalis followers makes it hard to prove this rumor.

Cult of the Winddancer

In the northern reaches of Graewynn, the Dagoni have resurrected a cult known as the Cult of the Winddancer. This cult worshiped the Equine Windddancer who is said to have taught the Dagoni everything they would need to become the greatest riders in history. This cult views horses with a mixture of reverence and divine right to claim any horse they come across in the name of their god.

Holding true to being called a cult, they only allow those with a great affection for horses to become one of their members and their practices are held away from the prying eyes of others. One thing is for certain, they are deeply involved in the Dagan Revival and have trained many in the arts of mounted combat.

Gethral Shamanism

Among the Gethral living closer to the ocean, several camps have been exploring shamanic practices attempting to engage the spirits of their ruined homeland. While these practices are still relatively new, many have said the spirits are all too eager to speak with and work with those who will listen. To the surprise of outsiders, the shaman are welcomed and even respected among the Rohari. Despite fundamental differences many Gethral respect and support the efforts of these shamans in hopes of restoring some of their lands so the Gethral no longer must raid to have the food and medicines they need.

Cult of the Scar

Those who have traveled the Daemonwake have told stories of an Ork'rus group living among the corrupted lands and attempting to contact the evils which created the Wake. Rumors of this Cult of the Scar suggest these Ork'rus have begun studying the Wake to learn more about their roots and potentially undo the Ritual of Transublimation and bring down the walls between the mortal world and the spirit world. Few believe they can do it, however, their use of Blood Magic and willingness to summon demonic creatures has many worried this could lead to something worse than the Daemonwake.

Abyssari (AH-bis-AR-RYE)

Among the Necropoli of Agrineas, hidden behind throngs of undead, it is said a dark coven of Necromancers have begun worshipping the being which taught Necromancy to the captives of Monsori Hektram before the Folly. There are rumors of the Necropotheosis. Most dismiss this as a wild rumor, however, many Agrineans insist there are Mortaeans among the Necropoli wielding strange and horrifying magic unlike anything they have ever seen.