

**EXILE:**

**RISING STAR**

**LOREBOOK**

**2017**

# Introduction Summary:

It has been 2017 years since history was lost. No one is entirely sure what happened, and accounts differ across the globe. Some say a massive comet struck the world, others say it was a war of the gods. Some cultures believe that a volcano erupted, destroying half the world and plunging the other half into a decade of darkness, while a good portion of the more advanced cultures believe it was a mortal war that spanned the globe. Whatever the cause, there is no record of the ancient past.

Nations have risen and fallen in those thousands of years, and the world can be separated into nine major nations, with a few dozen minor kingdoms and fiefdoms struggling to make the grade. The major nations are deemed as such not based on their military might, nor their political connections, but by population alone. These lands range from highly magically advanced, with ships made to fly along the lines of magical energy that cross the world, to a realm nearly entirely beneath the surface of a mountain range, to a wealthy society of builders and artisans, all the way to a mysterious nation buried deep in a swampy jungle.

Religious beliefs throughout the world are often vastly different, though a similar theme seems prevalent throughout: most nations who worship greater beings believe there to be five deific entities, which protect or wreak havoc on the mortals below them. These range from the most benevolent, who is seen to care for its followers and reward the just, to a malevolent being which encourages and assists the vile in bringing pain and suffering to those around them. While some claim to have heard the words of their god, they have never been seen, and the existence of the gods themselves is doubted entirely by some scholars.

Various continents are scattered about the globe, but it is the two Islands of Exile that truly draw the attention of dreamers and explorers alike. These islands move in a predictable path from the northern most pole to the southernmost, always directly opposite the world from one another. Navigators, with centuries of study to back their theories, have found that it takes approximately 100 years for an Island of Exile to travel from one pole to the other, and another century to return, while the Island on the other side of the world follows the opposite pattern.

Some astronomers draw attention to two distant stars in the heavens, that appear to follow the paths of the Islands, and some navigators use these stars to guide them. Depending on the time of the century, you can use the Dawn Star or the Dusk Star to find your way across the world.

No continents stand in their way, and the Paths of the Islands of Exile are considered the most treacherous waters to traverse. Because of this, the eastern and western hemispheres of the world only have very occasional contact. The mystical airships cannot cross the Paths of the Isles without crashing disastrously to the sea, and most mystic lines do not cross the Paths. The

terrible weather patterns caused by the Islands themselves makes it dangerous for ocean faring ships to cross traverse without skilled and clever captains at the helm.

The Islands themselves have been considered uninhabitable for as long as anyone can remember. It's not that it is impossibly difficult to safely navigate a ship close enough to the shore to disembark, though it is true. The Islands themselves have always roiled with a terrible magical storm. Even on the calmest day, any living creature introduced to the beaches would face a terrible fate. Some would turn into incredible magical beasts, and rampage off into the forests. Others would burst into flames, change into different animals altogether, contort into creatures of eldritch horror, or simply cease to be. While some sailors would swear that they could see living creatures or even beings watching ships from the cliffs beyond the forests, or peering out from the trees. No nation has been able to successfully land an adventuring party on the shores of either Island of Exile.

Until now.

Studies done by the magical college in one nation indicated that while the magics were terrible to behold, they were gradually dying down. Thus, for three centuries, an arrangement has been honored between four of the major nations of the world. Once a decade, a ship with an adventuring party, as well as magical scholars, from each of those nations would venture to each of the Islands of Exile to see if the land was safe to traverse. The ship would travel with livestock, traditionally a chicken, and using this animal, do a preliminary test to see if the magics were dangerous. This was done by unceremoniously (and rather unscientifically) hurling the chicken to the shore and watching to see what happened.

This most recent trip, 5 years back, the chicken survived unchanged. After tests were conducted, an adventuring party stepped foot on the Dawn Isle for the first time in historical memory. It was quickly discovered that while the magics of the island were not INSTANTLY disastrous, magical shifts often changed the landscape. One minute you could be standing amongst trees, another you would be shifted with the landscape and be back on the beach. One adventurer became lost as he was shifted away from the party and only found his way back to the beach after a harrowing week of trekking through an unknown and terrifying landscape.

After over a year of sleeping on ships to avoid being shifted in the night, the explorers were able to find a largish plot of stable land about a week's travel from the shore, which after extensive testing was discovered to never shift, though the land around it often did. Using this as a base of operations for further years of tests and exploration two other such areas were discovered and marked, as well as a half a dozen smaller such areas which were marked for small camps to make travel between the outposts easier.

An outpost for exploration has been established on each of the three larger plots of stable land. Many nations have been sending their own explorers to the Island, hoping for treasure, magical power, or simply knowledge from the lost Islands of Exile, and the outposts' population has been growing. Access to these outposts has been agreed to be the rights of everyone on the planet, as no one nation wants to cede ownership of the Islands of Exile to another.

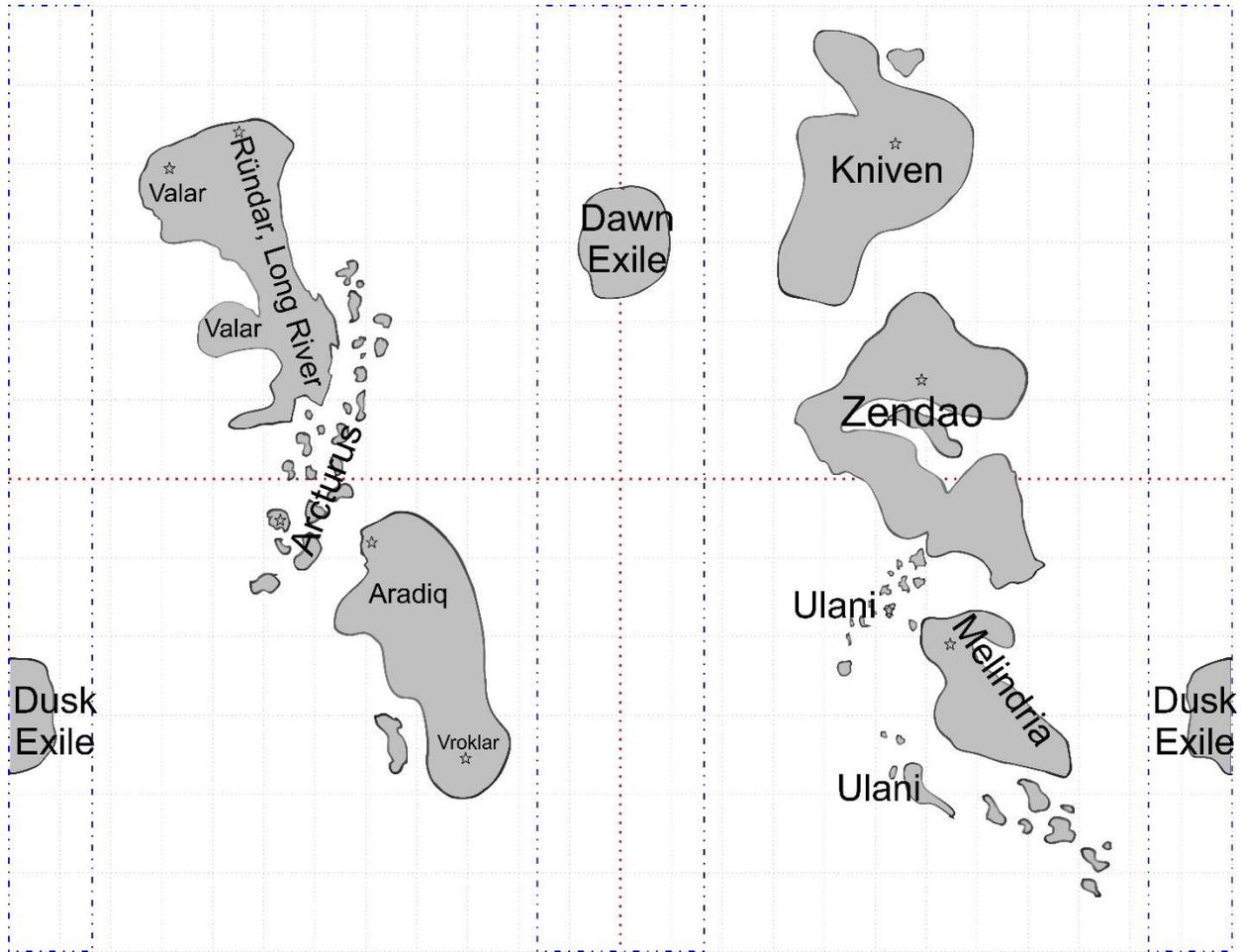
As a small point to note: only the Dawn Island of Exile has been such a success: any one to leave the beaches of the Dusk Island of Exile have not been seen or heard from since.

As such, adventures from many walks of life have begun to flock to the Dawn Island of Exile. Some come for power, others to escape their past, some to adventure, and others sent by their nations for many various reasons. Because the trip and the Island itself are indescribably dangerous, some nations are offering pardons to some of their less murderous criminals if they agree to explore to the Dawn Island for one to three years, and to send all knowledge or wealth gathered back to the nation from which they were pardoned. Others go hoping to colonize in a land that is not controlled by an existing nation. Some go to convert others to their beliefs, and still more go to wreak havoc.

Some people have been adventuring from the outposts, some even land unsanctioned ships and attempt to explore or conquer on their own, and even endeavor to raid the official outposts. Because of this, settlers/adventurers are encouraged to be able to defend themselves, as there are no large bodies of armed soldiers allowed to be maintained by any nation. It has been agreed to be a common territory, adhering to very few laws.

It is here that our story begins: why have you come to the Dawn Island, and what do you hope to discover?

# World Map:



# The Ulani Islands

**CAPITOL CITY:** Kanue

**POPULATION:** 50% Anarathi, 20% Dragorian, 25% mix of Humans, Elves, and Greenskins, and 5% Demons and other.

## **NOBILITY STRUCTURE:**

**Heir to a Chief** – Son or daughter of a chief (Rank 1)

**Wayfinder** – Captain of a ship, and its chief navigator (Rank 2)

**High Priest/Priestess** – The religious and/or spiritual leaders of a community. This takes years of study to achieve. (Rank 3)

**Island Chief** – The rulers of individual clans on an island. They can go adventuring for years in the name of their people, leaving their island under the command of a son or daughter. (Rank 4)

**Admiral** – In command of a portion of the fleet, usually 5 to 8 ships at the smallest. (Rank 5)

**Prince and Princess** – Children of, siblings of, and nieces and nephews of the King and Queen. You cannot be the first or second heir to the throne. (Rank 5)

**PREDOMINATE STYLE OF DRESS:** Lightweight clothing, often prepared for hot weather and lots of water. Lightweight fabric for skirts and tops for women, lightweight fabric for skirts/kilts for men. Furs during the rainy season. Lots of hand-crafted jewelry.

**COMMON WEAPONS:** Bows and Arrows, Spears, Shields, Knives, Staves, Ritualistic Magic.

**TECHNOLOGY LEVEL (We are using the Civ 5 General Scale here):** Ancient Era (Farming, Archery, Bronze working, Sailing, Writing, Etc)

## **SUMMARY:**

On the other side of the world from the kingdom of sky ships stretches a kingdom made entirely of an island chain that kisses at least two other continents. At the center of this island chain sits the largest island, built up over hundreds of years of volcanic activity. While the volcano that sits at the center of this island is mostly dormant, rituals and services still happen at the edge of the open vent. This island is home to the ruling family of this island nation, who oversee an empire of dozens of island fiefdoms.

Each individual island is led by its own noble family, all of whom answer to the king and queen. The king and queen will not make large decisions for the kingdom without first calling a meet of the chiefs of each island, to determine whether it is best for the country. Often the king and queen will have advisors from each island present at all official functions, so that each can speak on behalf of their tribe or community.

Each island has something that they have cultivated over the years, and it is a point of pride to take your specialty to trade. Some islands are the only people in the hemisphere who can produce a certain kind of fruit, or specialize in crafting ornate jewelry, or have the only mine in the chain that can produce magical ores and thus craft intricate magical weapons and armor.

This is a kingdom steeped in tradition: boats and ships are crafted lovingly and carved beautifully. Most are works of art that are handed down from generation to generation, with each new captain adding their own touches. Teenagers must undergo coming-of-age ceremonies, with different islands having their own ancient traditions. Some have the young warriors undergo ceremonial battles, others, especially on the central island, must prove their strength and endurance by walking the sacred ridge barefoot, despite the heat of the stone and the magma below. Many encourage their young adults to strike out into the world, learning as they go, and bringing back new knowledge to the community.

Magic is welcomed, and children who begin to show magical talent are immediately apprenticed to the local shaman, midwife, druid, or whomever that community looks to for magical and spiritual guidance. Those who can do magic are rare, but revered, with each community having anywhere from as low as three to as many as fifteen at a time.

This kingdom has maintained an amiable relationship with the larger continents around it, partly due to their willingness to be the main source of shipping and trading, and partly due to having the fiercest warriors in the region. Mercy is not their by-word, and pirates, murderers, and the like are treated to a swift and gruesome death. If captured on the islands, murderers and rapists are sentenced to death, with each island having their own preference as to style, while the central island prefers to hold them until they can be ceremoniously sacrificed to the spirits of fire and earth (the volcano). If captured on the water, they are decapitated, their body thrown to the sharks and their head mounted on the masts for the voyage home.

Murder, and assault are illegal in this kingdom, and punished harshly. Theft is illegal as well, though often circumstances are taken into consideration when assigning a punishment. The

leaders of each community will issue sentences in these cases. Magic and resurrection are not illegal, but dark magics are frowned upon and feared.

# The Valar Confederacy

**CAPITOL CITY:** Stahlkirche

**POPULATION:** 30% Humans, 20% Greenskins, 50% even split between the rest.

## **NOBILITY STRUCTURE:**

**Deacon** – Lowest rank of the church above new members. Often assigned to military units. (Rank 1)

**Lieutenant** – A rank in the military hierarchy, which rules the actions of the entire kingdom. (Rank 1)

**Priest** – Often in charge of an entire church or cathedral. (Rank 2)

**Captain** – A rank in the military hierarchy, which rules the actions of the entire kingdom. (Rank 2)

**Abbot** – In charge of an entire area, often with 4 to 8 churches under their command. Will regularly be assigned by a Cardinal to serve a General in the army, and watch for the spiritual health of division. (Rank 3)

**Major** – A rank in the military hierarchy, which rules the actions of the entire kingdom. (Rank 3)

**Cardinal** – Next rank in the church below the Bishops. Oversees an entire region, with multiple abbots responding to them, and assigns priests and abbots to the appropriate areas in need. (Rank 4)

**Colonel** – A rank in the military Hierarchy, which rules the actions of the entire kingdom. (Rank 4)

**Bishop** – Highest rank in the church below the Arch Bishop, who runs the church. There are a double handful of these at any time, and are often assigned to go abroad to further the desires of god and country. (Rank 5)

**General** – Highest rank in the army, and as long as they are in country they have a seat on the senate. (Rank 5)

**PREDOMINATE STYLE OF DRESS:** Ancient Greco-Roman style clothing. Leather armor, tunics and togas are all not uncommon, with the upper echelon of warriors wearing full-plate.

**COMMON WEAPONS:** Swords, Shields, Spears, Halberds, Flintlock Rifles.

**TECHNOLOGY LEVEL (We are using the Civ 5 General Scale here):** Renaissance Era (Gunpowder, Banking, Printing Press, Navigation, Astronomy)

### **SUMMARY:**

This empire is better oiled than any machine. When the rest of the world appeared to be falling apart, a small kingdom of organized warriors began to take over their region. Efficient and persevering, this kingdom eventually conquered the entire region, instituting martial law, and working closely with the local churches to craft an empire built on discipline and faith.

Where most noble families hand the throne to an eldest child, when the emperor dies here, the throne passes to whichever of their children holds the highest rank in the military. All children are required upon maturity to join the military for at least 4 years, even the children of nobility. While commoners enlist, nobility purchases commissions, becoming officers. Occasionally the emperor or empress will manipulate their children's promotions if they prefer one to inherit the throne over another.

This kingdom is very regulated, and in addition to the religious order, it could be said that they nearly treat rules, regulation and bureaucracy as a second religion. Children often learn about great generals and war heroes in school and their songs and stories all center around heroic tales and victorious battles.

If you do not wish to perform military service, you can choose to go into the religious order for the rest of your life. You pledge your service to the gods, providing moral guidance and protection from evil magics to citizens and military alike. No orphanages exist in the entire empire, as children with no homes are sent to the church. There they learn a trade, and at maturity can also choose military or religious service. Children of the cloth are always given a commission, and it is not unheard of for a poor family with little ability to afford a new child to leave it in a basket on the steps of a local church.

The religious order is incredibly strict, and both the military and the church view magic as blasphemous and often evil. While the empire will deal and trade with other kingdoms, though they prefer to only deal with people who do not use magic in their crafts. Alchemists and smiths are common in this kingdom, with the former mending the wounds caused by the tools of the latter.

Members of the church cannot raise very high in the ranks of the order without bringing in converts. After a certain rank in the order, the faithful must venture out into the world and

return with at least one convert from another nation to achieve the next rank. The military likewise will send out members in good standing to learn about other kingdoms, and bring back information to the empire.

In recent years, with so much communication between the empire and other kingdoms, a new tradition has begun. After 4 years in the military, or 4 years of active religious service, a citizen in good standing may take a leave of absence. They may venture out into the world to learn and see new things. Most choose to return to their kingdom and families, but some choose to live life in different cultures, enjoying the change of pace and tradition.

Theft is illegal, as is murder and assault. However, executions are not an uncommon punishment for those who commit horrible crimes. In addition, trial by combat, or personal combat often happens to settle disputes. All forms of magic and resurrection are illegal in this kingdom, as it is taking power and devotion away from the gods.

# The Cities of Zendao

**CAPITOL CITY:** Sprul

**POPULATION:** 20% Dragorians, 20% Demons, 15% Humans, 15% Greenskins, 15% Elves, 15% Anarathi

## **NOBILITY STRUCTURE:**

**Warlock** – A wizard who possesses battle prowess may be knighted by a Duke, Duchess, Arch-Mage or High Magus. (Rank 1)

**Lord/Lady Wizard** – Either the direct child of a Arch-Mage, or an off-relation of the High Magus. (Rank 1)

**Magistrate** – Placed in charge of a city, a Magistrate must have graduated from one of the cities' institute of high magics. A few are master enchanters, mastering a craft, though often these are not held in as high esteem. (Rank 2)

**Bishop** – Often called a “Bishop of X” where X is what they excel at magically, a bishop often gains their title from a family name, but must master a field of magic or risk having their title revoked by the King/Queen. (Rank 3)

**Duke and Duchess** – Instead of Prince and Princesses, the non-inheriting children of the King/Queen (High Magus) are considered Dukes and Duchesses. They are required to be masters of at least one field of magic. (Rank 4)

**Arch-Mage** – The grand magistrate of one of the various cities' institutes of high magics. Occasionally they will leave their tower/temple/college/library in the care of another and go adventuring for knowledge or power. (Rank 5)

**PREDOMINATE STYLE OF DRESS:** Robes and loose garments, flowing sleeves and lots of silk, Japanese and Chinese in design for some, lord of the rings style robes and dresses for other.

**COMMON WEAPONS:** Staves, Wands, Swords, Shields, Magic.

**TECHNOLOGY LEVEL (We are using the Civ 5 General Scale here):** Medieval Era with heavy Fantasy Influences (Magic spells, communication orbs, guilds, basic machinery, some amount of common learning.)

## **SUMMARY:**

Once this continent was a sprawling mess of minor magical kingdoms, each ruling their small plots of land with varying degrees of insanity and cruelty. The spirit lines on the continent crossed directly through the center, where a powerful meeting of these lines made for a massive point of magical energy; a perfect place to rule the entire landmass.

Each of those little kingdoms warred, and fought for control of one another, and especially the center meets of spirit lines. Truces were made and broken, backs were stabbed, and alliances were betrayed, and at the end one warlord conquered the land.

Many of the old warlords became barons under the new emperor, and prospered under his rule. With a truce between the warring keeps, temples, towers and castles, each were able to focus on their own crafts. One baron specialized in high magics, hurling raw power and perfecting the art of combat magic, another focused on a massive library of history and spells, yet another focused her efforts into crafting magic and simple machines together. Each cultivated his or her citizens into specialists in their field, with sprawling cities spread around each central, wizardly keep.

Crafters from this nation are said to be beyond compare for their ingenuity and magical prowess. If a person ever needed a master wand smith, or scroll scribe, or enchanter, it is likely they could be found here. Often it is said that this country is at odds with the kingdom of sky ships, as they have yet to crack the secret of the floating structures, and thus have not been able to bring the ships to their side of the world.

Most children are born with some innate magical ability. Before they reach puberty, most children have shown themselves to have the ability to heal, or speak to spirits, start fires, or move things without touching them. Some show prowess enough to be apprenticed to the barons, or high enchanters in the area, others take after their parents and inherit the family business.

While rare, some children are born with no magical abilities at all. Upon reaching puberty, these children are apprenticed to the monasteries outside of the cities. Each of these monasteries towns boast a temple dedicated to an element: light, dark, fire, water, air, earth, and shrines to the others. The central city, home of the emperor, holds a large temple to each element. When a monastery takes in a child, they are taught patience and honor. They meditate and train, becoming measured and neutral. The students learn to combat magic with crafting and will, and though they cannot cast themselves, they are made into experts at combating mages. The elemental monks are often called in to settle disputes, or preside over courts or sentencing. While outcasts, they are looked upon as honorable and neutral, and the emperor himself looks to the leaders of the monasteries for advice.

Sometimes orphans will be apprenticed to the monks, and if these children manifest magic, they are trained to control it. Where the castles and cities often see magic as a tool to exploit, control, and manipulate, the monks with magical power see it as a force of nature, to be respected and guided. They are regarded as some of the fiercest warriors in defense of peace and justice. It is often noted that, while the wizards run the show, it is the monks who are sent abroad to act as ambassadors.

Murder, theft and assault are illegal throughout the empire, but no form of magic is. Necromancy and the darker magics are practiced somewhere in every city, and there is a tower in the northern portion of the empire with a smaller city around it, but entirely bent on learning and exploring darker magics.

# Arcturus, The Iron Plateau

**CAPITOL CITY:** Teslavar

**POPULATION:** 30% Greenskins, 20% Demons, 50% even mix of Humans, Dragorians, Elves and Anarathi

## **NOBILITY STRUCTURE:**

**Lieutenant** – Appointed by the Captain, often considered knights and swashbuckling heroes. (Rank 1)

**Captain** – Captain of a ship. (Rank 2)

**Marquis and Marquess** – A member of a merchant princes' family, or a retired merchant Prince or Princess. (Rank 3)

**Count and Countess** – Members of the High Family who do not stand to inherit. Often can also be the captain of a ship. (Rank 4)

**Admiral** – Commander of a fleet of ships, be they Sky Ships or Sea Faring. These men and women defend Arcturus and the Dragon Lines from scoundrels who would seek to claim others' riches for themselves. (Rank 5)

**Merchant Prince or Princess** – Owners of a fleet of ships, or perhaps a fleet of crafting facilities, these get granted their titles by the Prime Minister and his council. The titles pass to their children upon their death or retirement. (Rank 5)

**Prime Minister** – Voted in by the merchant princes to rule below the Patriarch. (Unobtainable)

**The High Family's Patriarch** – The leader of the High Family is USUALLY female, but this generation, the first in history, was passed to a male. It is set to pass to his daughter upon his death. (Unobtainable)

**PREDOMINATE STYLE OF DRESS:** A mix of swashbuckler and steampunk. The hats get INTENSE

**COMMON WEAPONS:** Swords, Crossbows, Flintlocks, Magic.

**TECNOLOGY LEVEL (We are using the Civ 5 General Scale here):** Renaissance Era (Gunpowder, Banking, Printing Press, Navigation, Astronomy) With added Magic-tek, as their ships and sometimes lights and the like are run by specialized magic.

## **SUMMARY:**

A family of enterprising Greenskin master craftsmen one day, over 200 years ago, bought a ship and set out to discover the perfect island for their work. Their mages tracked magical energies in a chain of islands until they were able to find one which sat in the center of a meet of flowing magical lines of power. This island was perfect, rising hundreds of feet above the water, and nearly impossible to climb without equipment. There they built their workshop and turned their ship into the first ever sky-ship. Many flocked to learn of these magical creations, which could fly unerringly along the lines of energy, but were dismayed to discover that, while the Family would sell them working crystalline engines, they would not sell, share, or in any way divulge the secret of crafting them.

Decades passed, and their plateau island has become the center to an impressive merchant empire, populated enough and well enough armed to be recognized in the world' council as quickly as 75 years after their formation. The island chain has the benefit of being centralized, and The Family clever enough to turn their island into a massive docking station, where folks come to trade, seek repairs, and have their crystalline engines recharged. Purchasing a large and well-made crystal would ensure that not only could you launch a larger ship, but you would only need to recharge it once or twice a year. Hand-me-down crystals, used from captain to captain may take wear and tear over the years and need to be charged as many as six times a year. The only people in the world who know the secret of charging the ships are The Family, and they guard that secret rabidly.

As their empire began to form, part of the cost to purchase a crystalline engine could be reduced if it included a cut of the shipping profits for 10 years after purchase. The island was run like a business, and if you wanted to live or dock there, you had to pay. Guards were hired, and eventually an army formed. After generations of The Family ruling, a fully functioning government had formed. The Family line passes from Mother to Eldest Daughter, and they have maintained a peace-keeping force, instituted a council of merchant leaders to vote on laws and decisions in wartime. There are no taxes in this kingdom. Docking fees go to The Family, and they have stock in enough companies, as well as the recharging fees (and many other businesses that they own and operate) that they do not feel it necessary to charge taxes, making it a haven for many shipping organizations both in the sky and on the water to call their home.

The ships can only remain in the air when they are on the magical lines of energy (often called spirit lines, but are known as ley lines, sky lines, dragon lines, and world lines, depending on where you are) and if they leave a line, they will drift slowly to the ground, where they will not be able to get back into the air unless moved back to a spirit line. Large, reliable spirit lines

crisscross the world, and touch on many of the continents. These are more often traveled by ships, as they are stable, unlikely to fail in a storm, and are more often patrolled, making them less likely to harbor rogues and marauders.

Often smaller lines will make a shorter route between continents, but these can sometimes fail in a storm, or even just have a predictable pattern of waxing and waning, and therefore are more of a risk to travel. Hot-shot captains, bent on making a faster trip, will often risk these lines, where they also risk a run-in with marauders. Or even a special breed of magical birds who reside on the lines. These birds, a little bigger than pigeons, live on the lines and need the background energy to live. They are drawn to the crystalline engines of the ships, flocking to it and latching onto the ship, slowly draining magic and obscuring vision. Most ships have archers or mages to repel them, and larger, legitimate voyages will hire smaller ships to clear the lines ahead of them.

Duels are not uncommon in this kingdom, and merchants and captains will settle disputes with a duel to first blood. Rarer are duels to the death, but they still happen. The main-city is full of crafters, as it is possible to learn to repair the crystalline engines, or even to hook a lot of smaller ones up to power larger ships. The only thing that these clever crafters cannot do is create new engines, or charge old ones.

Skill is valued over familial ties, and you can gain power and influence more through being a clever negotiator or a skilled crafter or artist than you can simply by being related to a famous relative. Nobility is nearly non-existent, and is instead replaced with your status with the nearly all-powerful business guild. The Family has a member who sits at the head of the guild, and it is this guild which decides various legal and mercantile disputes and concerns. In addition, a well-stocked military answers to The Family first, and the guild second, and ranked officers are given a lot of clout.

Murder, theft, and assault are illegal in this kingdom. No form of magic is illegal, though using magic of any kind against a person without their permission is considered assault.

# Ründar, The Long River

**CAPITOL CITY:** Maresruth

**POPULATION:** 40% Human, 30% Elf, 5% of each other race including Awoken and Ethereal

## **NOBILITY STRUCTURE:**

**Bard** – Each town has at least one appointed Bard, who often doubles as a healer and a worker of magics. The Bard is a respected position, often adjudicating disputes. (Rank 1)

**Champion** – Warriors who defend the realm, and will stand in for others in battle if needed. Often referred to as Sir or Dame. (Rank 2)

**Virtuoso** – Master of a craft (male or female) a Virtuoso is held in high esteem in their towns. This person can be a master smith, a master song writer, a master alchemist, and so on: they must be acknowledged by the council to receive this title. (Rank 3)

**Dirge Priest** – Priests who reside in the caverns at the exit of the river. When someone from any of the towns pass-away, their bodies are placed on barges and sent down-river to be collected by the Dirge Priests, who sing the songs of passing, and inter the bones in the great catacombs that they monitor. (Rank 4)

**Councilor** – They meet twice a year in the council chambers at the spring that feeds the river, and bring decisions, concerns, and news from all towns. Each town appoints its councilor, and each town has its own rules for how long their terms are. (Rank 5)

**PREDOMINATE STYLE OF DRESS:** thick leathers, many pouches, kilts, high waterproof boots, often bare shoulders and arms, water-resistant wools and overcoats

**COMMON WEAPONS:** Swords, Magic, Knives, Crossbows, Thrown Weapons.

**TECHNOLOGY LEVEL (We are using the Civ 5 General Scale here):** Medieval Era with light Fantasy influence (less high magics, and more day-to-day stuff, like orbs of light, or healing spells)

## **SUMMARY:**

Many upheavals have happened in the past few thousand years: cataclysms that struck across the entire world, as well as smaller ones which nonetheless wiped entire communities or nations off the map. In many cases this means refugees, cast offs, and hundreds if not thousands of homeless. In the case of those along one mountain range, everything was different.

When massive storms struck the coast, a fishing community ran to the hills, taking brief shelter in the caves far above the waterline. More storms later in the year sent them running again, and this time many families remained in the caves when the water line lowered. On the other side of the mountain range, a magical cataclysm shook the plains, sending herders evacuating to the mountains, rapidly clearing out caverns to shelter themselves and their beasts until the insanity died down. Afterwards, they brought the cows in at night, but built pens and pastures just outside of their caverns, to give the animals outside space, but a haven in the dark. Further north, miners brought their families and friends, as well as livestock and stored food into their depleted mines to weather a massive war between local lords. At the southernmost portion of the mountain range, priests and priestesses who were tasked to upkeep catacombs of the departed found it safer to live alongside their deceased charges, holding masses and gatherings in caverns hollowed out by water, or in clearings and fields just outside of their cave openings.

Over the decades, this mountain range became home to many different communities. Over time, each community found their way to digging deeper into the mountain: to make homes for growing families, storage for supplies and food, living spaces to gather in storms or shelter in times of war. In their delving deeper into the stone, each town/family eventually found that running deep under the mountain range was a river.

The river runs from the northern most point to the outlet in a sheltered gulf at the southernmost point of a mountain range that spans an entire continent. One by one, each community along the mountains found their way to the river. Miners found it faster, others found it through necessity: it was too dangerous to go out for water, so they followed the drips in the dark.

Centuries passed. Nations above expanded and fell, never quite knowing that one was growing under-ground. Communities discovered each other, often by young, adventurous people finding the river, crafting boats, and exploring. The mining communities from the northern most parts of the range expanded the caverns along the river, raising the ceilings so that no matter how high the river got, boats and people could pass unimpeded. Drains and overflow caverns were carved from the stone around the river, giving communities calm fishing holes during low-tide, and ensuring that home-caverns were not flooded in high-tide. Hooks and lines and chains are maintained through the length of the river, so that travel upriver is easier against the current.

The various settlements along the river remained independent long after the kingdoms started to reform on the surface. When they were eventually discovered and in some cases their land contested, the people living along the river decided to band together into a unified kingdom. Already after centuries of joining together, the communities had developed a rich tradition of relationships, songs, stories and laws, and so in one great meet, some hundred years ago, the

leaders of each community passed a series of laws that outlined the governing of their new nation. A council now meets, once a year, to discuss current issues, condemn criminals, or welcome new members of the council.

Trading happens up and down the river, and the communities are all welcoming and joyful to receive news and visits from others under the mountains. It is not uncommon to be traveling down the river and hear singing in the dark. It is said long silence is bad-luck, as those who may have become lost on the river, or in the tunnels cannot find their way home. Those on the river sing songs and call out to one another, meals are often accompanied by stories and song.

Most people along the river have adopted the tradition of branding: tattoos you can feel in the dark. At the very least, nearly every citizen has one to three brands on the inside of their left wrists. The first two brands are often given upon birth, and they are the brand of their community: telling all others where they come from, as well as the child's first name. If you come across a lost child who cannot find their way, this brand tells concerned adults where the child lives. If you come across a body in the water, the brand tells you which family is missing a loved one. The third is the mark of the family that they marry into. A person, be they male or female, who marries into another community is welcomed upon their wedding day with a brand, telling the nation who they have chosen to love.

It is common for this nation to shake with their left hands, grasping the forearm of the other to be able to tell, in an instant in the dark, to whom they are speaking. Others will tattoo or brand themselves elsewhere as decoration, or badges of honor, and not all are raised. Some seek out the mages of the nation for special inks that are bioluminescent, and glow in the dark.

There is a tradition under the mountain of sending the dead down-river. When a family loses a member, they will build a float, and wrap the body. Candles and sweet-smelling herbs, or bioluminescent mosses will be packed around the body, and it will be launched down the river. Communities along the way will launch into funeral dirges when a funeral barge comes around the river, adding flowers or luck charms as the barge goes by.

At the outlet of the river there are priests who reverently collect the bodies, and build pyres to burn what is left of the soft tissue away. The bones are then collected and laid to rest in huge caverns, maintained by the priests. The clergy are revered along the river and are often sent for to mediate disputes, or preside over weddings. In the same way that bodies are sent down river, so often are small floats announcing births or weddings, letting all on the river know of the happy occasion: or at least all those down river from you.

Young members of communities will often partake in a tradition of Sending Down River. They will build their own boats and travel down-river, meeting people and adventuring as far as they can go. It is said that most do not make it to the base of the river without meeting the love of their life. Some take their new bride or husband and travel back home, others stay where they have fallen in love.

Outsiders are rarely trusted. Though some are welcomed to individual communities, at first, they are treated with unease. The surface kingdoms were not happy to discover a potential threat underneath even as they enjoyed the benefits of an underground lane of travel. The cosmopolitan yet isolated people became targets of ridicule for their unusual ways and unease above ground. Branded as “subbies” [typically “subbie bastards”], they are often reviled as thieves and cowards, as uncivilized men and women who would sell their children, and as people who live in the dark because even they could not stand themselves in the light. Which is often very untrue: most communities maintain pastures, playgrounds, groves or farms in the mountains, outside in the light of day. Children run and climb trees, or in storms stay inside. Homes, shops, workshops, and the like are all inside the safety of the caverns, but they are no strangers to the outdoors.

Despite the hatred levied upon them, the Delvers sporadically find their way above ground in search of wealth for their families and anything that could bolster their communities. Home remains underground by the river, but damn if the world above isn't a wonderland worth singing about.

They are often the first to sing in a tavern, the first to laugh at a joke, or more accurately the first to make one. This kingdom has fantastic bards, impressive metal and stone smiths, as well as an astounding caches of gems and precious metals. Jewelry is common, and some stones that those in the above world would find to be rare and fantastic can be work by farm-hands and maids.

They don't care much for religion, and do not worship the gods, but revere the spirits of their dead, and hold family in the highest regard. Many will travel outside of the nation to explore, and are not looked down upon but their communities.

# The Plains of Kniven

**CAPITOL CITY:** Silvis

**POPULATION:** 30% Dragorians, 20% Greenskins, 50% even split between the rest.

## **NOBILITY STRUCTURE:**

**Cavalier** – The horsemen and women of the plains, the Cavaliers are anointed by the Wise Man (or Woman) or by a Warlord, as the leaders of armies and defenders of the innocent. (Rank 1)

**Seer** – Shamans, healers, or the children of Prophets, every town endeavors to have a Seer to tend to their minds, bodies and souls. (Rank 2)

**Druid** – Accepted by the Wise Man (or Woman), these casters and wise men and women keep the records of the kingdom and tend to the Great Tree and the magics therein. (Rank 3)

**Prophets** – Seers of great visions, a Prophet is acknowledged by the Wise Man (or Woman), and their children are anointed as Seers, of the lineage of these powerful and blessed prophets. (Rank 4)

**Warlord** – Rulers of the individual towns, Warlords maintain armies and defend the land, collecting taxes and generally being the people who run things. It is said, though, a harsh word from The Wise Man (or Woman) who rules the Druid Caste, can destroy a Warlord and his lands within a cycle of the moon. The children of a Warlord are Cavaliers. (Rank 5)

**PREDOMINATE STYLE OF DRESS:** Earthy and simple. Woven dresses, simple robes, embroidered flowers and leaves, flower jewelry.

**COMMON WEAPONS:** Staves, Bow and Arrows, Shields, Swords, Thrown Weaponry, Magic, Spears.

**TECHNOLOGY LEVEL (We are using the Civ 5 General Scale here):** Ancient Era (Farming, Archery, Bronze working, Sailing, Writing, Etc) with druidic, ritualistic magic influences.

## **SUMMARY:**

The people of this kingdom are very in tune with nature. The population can be easily divided into three categories: farming communities, nomadic hunters, and the druidic caste that “rules” it all. The landscape for the nation consists of grasslands to the south, fading into tundra to the north.

To the north, where animal life with thick fur roam through the harsher wastelands, nomadic tribes track and hunt, providing pelts, meats, and mystical components for trade with their southern brethren.

In the southern most portion of the kingdom farming communities dot the landscape, with little towns nestled in tiny, man-cultivated groves of trees strong enough to withstand the often-powerful winds.

Further south still is a sudden mountain range, with very few passes through. Each pass has a small farming community that has set up and expanded out from it, often becoming centers of trade with other kingdoms. In the very few instances of attack that this nation has had to fend off, it is these communities who do most of the fighting. Carefully carved and cultivated passages up into the crags above the passes allow for easy defense of this large nation, and their close relationship with natural magics helps them make this one of the most peaceful nations on the globe.

In the center of the kingdom, or as near to the center as one can get without proper boarders, sits The Great Tree. A miles long ring of jutting stone, pushed up out of the gently rolling hills by a forgotten act of nature thousands of years ago, protects the area managed by the druid elders. The druids make their homes in the gaps and hallows of these stones, often growing trees and vines to make walls and natural ceilings.

It is here that the histories of this nation are stored. Carved temples reach into the stone, where hidebound leather family trees are kept carefully pristine. Decisions of tribal elders are documented and given to the druidic caste, who maintain the integrity of the nation’s long history.

At the center of this ring of stone sits The Great Tree. Many view the Tree as the center of their entire kingdom, binding the different peoples together.

Once every four years a great gathering draws together around this tree. The nomadic tribes travel south, and each village sends a delegation north to meet in a month-long celebration of life, music and love. The names of children born in those years are given to the druids, who store them in the temples, and who then carefully carve them into the newest branches on The Great Tree. Deaths are recorded, as are marriages and decisions made by tribe and village elders. It is said that marriages are not considered true in the eyes of the spirits until they are declared during the celebration, where druids take turns reading out all the births, deaths, and marriages in an unending stream all month.

Many tribes and villages send their unattached young adults to the gathering, in the hopes they find a life partner. It is a major help against in-breeding, and much celebrated if your child finds a partner from another tribe or village. Though, obviously with such a long history there are many feuds, there are also many ties from one group to another.

This is an immense help when one of the nomadic tribes has an elderly or injured member who can no longer move with the family. They will often reach out to family members who have settled in the villages and find one who can take them in. With the young going off to travel or live with other clans, and the old coming back to villages to retire, the entire nation is a web of interconnecting families and relationships. Part of the druidic caste's responsibilities include making sure no one marries a close relative.

Magic is widely accepted throughout the tribes. Each village or nomadic family looks to an elder, who often possesses natural magics, for guidance and wisdom. Young men and women who show magical tendencies are often taken under the wing of the family's shaman, or will sometimes be left after the Gathering with the druids for further training. These adepts will commune with The Great Tree, often taking cast off branches as staves, twigs and sticks as wands, or will grind the leaves for powerful healing potions, or pulp bark and branches into enhanced paper for leather-bound scroll-books. Cast-offs of The Great Tree are much sought after, rarely sold outside of the nation, and more often gifted from parent to child, or mentor to student. It is not uncommon for a strong staff made of The Great Tree to be in a family for generations, or for a wise-woman to teach familial histories from a book made of this enhanced paper.

Often restless members of this nation will be sent out into the world to explore and learn. Most who leave the nation leave with some piece of The Great Tree, either large enough to be useful in magics or ceremonies, or small enough to simply be a totem of good luck.

# Melindria

**CAPITOL CITY:** Veranon

**POPULATION:** 30% Demon, 20% Human, 45% mix of Dragorians, Anarathi, Elves, Greenskins, and 5% other.

## **NOBILITY STRUCTURE:**

**Ritter (Serra for Females and Sir for Males)** (Rank 1)

**Lady/Lord** (Rank 2)

**Countess/Count** (Rank 3)

**Duchess/Duke** (Rank 4)

**Princess/Prince/Archduchess/Archduke** – The Archduchess is the heir in the event the Princess is unable to inherit the throne, and The Archduke's wife, if there is no viable Archduchess. (Rank 5)

**PREDOMINATE STYLE OF DRESS:** Victorian Gothic

**COMMON WEAPONS:** Swords and Knives, Flintlock Pistols, Magic.

**TECHNOLOGY LEVEL (We are using the Civ 5 General Scale here):** Renaissance Era (Gunpowder, Banking, Printing Press, Navigation, Astronomy)

## **SUMMARY:**

In the wake of a cataclysmic event, demons seemed to be everywhere on the world. The Chaos Night emptied into the mortal plane, and everywhere seemed flooded. No community or kingdom was comfortable with a lot of them suddenly settling in their communities.

The demon population found an abandoned city, with towering buildings and massive cathedrals. Despite the city being empty, and the landscape around it appearing blasted and

barren, the architecture was untouched. The original discovery of this city was heralded as a blessing, and demon kind flocked to their new home.

It wasn't until the mortal demons had inhabited the city for some time that the dark magics began to make themselves apparent. Horrific curses, ancient creatures, and a history of dark and vile magics being worked in the city by previous residents had left a stain on the landscape, and these things would rear their ugly heads on a regular basis. Whole streets would become overrun with magically saturated creatures. Entire buildings would suddenly come under strange mental effects, and occasionally large beasts and horrors would rise from the sewers or rampage across the blasted landscape.

The original demon settlers tamed the city as best they could. They took back the beautiful architecture and made it nearly safe to live. Many others, in the hundreds of years since, have moved to the kingdom, ruled by a matriarchal family of noble demons. Beings of all races now live alongside the demons who founded the kingdom, and the land all around the original city is dotted with towns, farms, keeps, and life.

Dwellers in this kingdom are no strangers to strangeness. It is not uncommon to have a mutated rat attempt a hostile takeover of your pantry, oozing dark magics from every pore. The peacekeeping forces in every city and town are very used to arriving to a scene and having to disenchant all members of a massive brawl, or stopping a dominated housewife from murdering her entire block.

Despite all of this, this kingdom is well known for its theater and plays. Their merchant district is well organized and regulated. Aside from the swirling issues with dark magic that are nearly constant and low-grade, the kingdom is considered more or less safe to live in. Rent is often low, and the laws are strict. No murder, theft, assault, or slavery. The demon race recalls in its history when they were summoned regularly and enslaved, and has no desire to see any such behavior continue. As such, binding undead is outlawed as well, as it is considered to be a type of slavery, though no other magics are considered taboo.

The Rennault Family is the current Rule Family of Melindria, with the Empress Elizabeth Rennault being the current ruler. Her husband, Clarence Rennault, was a former [Duke] of Arcturus, and married Empress Elizabeth as part of a political arrangement. They have two children; Tybalt, her first born, and his twin sister Sylvia, the Heir Apparent.

Though everyone is given a Chosen and a Familial Name (like John Smith,) In Melindria, it is a tradition for someone to grow into a name, called their Handle. This name tends to be a description of the person's profession, their standing in their community, or their accomplishments. In Example, John Smith may be known as John Smith, Who Tends To the Injured, if he were a doctor, or His Word is Worthless, if he betrayed the trust of an ally. These names tend to become cumbersome and lengthy in the higher up reaches of society, and are often used by nobility and royalty to flaunt their position. So, The Duchess Vanimar may also be known as The Duchess Vanimar, Keeper of the Secret of Elizabeth, Who's Word is Law, Given Twice Her Mother's Burden, etc...

The Police Force of Melindria are known as The Faceless. These guards and peace keepers are the primary Judicial Force of Melindria, and protect it's citizens from crime. They wear featureless black masks while on detail, to protect their identities from their neighbors. This is because The Faceless are expected to pass out justice swiftly and firmly. They are not Judge, Jury, and Executioner in most cases, though for crimes considered Most Heinous, such as murder or slavery, they are given the authority to take life.

In addition to The Faceless, there is an officially sanctioned force called The Keeper's Hands. They are a quasi-religious sect that is specifically trained in containing and dispelling the nefarious and pervasive magics that linger in Melindria. They are given complete authority on any matter regarding The Creep, as it is called, and are recognized by their Badge, which is the Symbol of The Keeper in an open hand.

Throughout Melindria, there is a feeling of unease that anyone with a connection to The Arcane can identify easily; It is The Creep. The Creep is a lingering magical perversion that, if it manages to concentrate into an area, can cause things to begin to twist and change into horrific perversions. The Dead have risen, rats have grown large and sprouted tentacles, and people have been launched into a frenzy. The Creep as no identifiable source or pattern, though there are signs of Creep Concentration beginning to take hold. The Keeper's Hands are specially trained to deal with these occurrences, and are given the authority by the crown to do so.

Melindria is home to The Faith of The Three, a church that believes in a Triumvirate of the Divine. The Three are believed to rely on one another for their existence, and as such, the faith of Melindria leads its followers to believe that all Good and Bad must be taken in equal measure. The three gods are:

**The Keeper:** The Keeper is the Goddess of Life, The Divine Feminine, and Rebirth. The Keeper teaches that life is cyclical, and that Woman is the gateway through which all things must enter this world. Her followers believe that a life of peace and harmony can be found through acceptance of burden and responsibility. Those whose names are given to The Keeper are given eternal paradise in the afterlife.

**The Hollow:** The Hollow is the God of Nothing. He is seen as the empty spaces between everything physical and metaphysical, and is believed to be a sentinel for The Keeper and The Devourer. He views all actions, as he is everywhere and nowhere at the same time, and carries the names of those he finds either worthy or unworthy to the appropriate Goddess. Those who fail to catch the attention of The Hollow are reborn into a new life, where they are given another chance.

**The Devourer:** The Devourer is the Goddess of Death and Oathbreakers. She is often depicted in the abstract; her form never being truly identified. It is believed that she is all consuming, and that The Hollow is the only things keeping her from consuming the entire world, his existence keeping the space between Life and Death. But those who The Hollow deems unfit are given in name to The Devourer, and when she is given a taste of their existence, she will stop at nothing to consume them. Oathbreakers find solace in knowing they are already doomed, and as such, pay tribute to her.

# The Swamps of Vroklar

**CAPITOL CITY:** Jura

**POPULATION:** 30% Elves, 20% Anarathi, 50% even mix of Demons, Dragorians, Humans and Greenskins.

## **NOBILITY STRUCTURE:**

**Sorcerer/Sorceress** – Anointed apprentices to the town Priest/Priestess. (Rank 1)

**Kinder** – Heir to the Chief of a clan, these often go out to seek power or fortune before returning to command their tribe or clan. (Rank 2)

**Shaman** – Sometimes called Mama or Papa, this is a tribe's high enchanter. They can be a healer, or a blood mage, but they are trained by the Shaman before them, and are looked up to and respected by all tribes. (Rank 3)

**Chieftain** – The ruler of a tribe or clan. Occasionally will leave the clan in the hands of their heirs and go out for power. (Rank 4)

**Elder** – The council of Elders technically “rule” the Swamps of Vroklar. Each must be elected by the chieftains of two tribes that are recognized by the council. Each sit on the council for up to 5 years, but can be replaced if their assigning tribes do not like them. Once an Elder, always an Elder: the title remains. (Rank 5)

**PREDOMINATE STYLE OF DRESS:** Leathers and hides, furs and braids, a mix of bayou and Viking.

**COMMON WEAPONS:** Swords, Knives, Bows and Arrows, Magic, Staves.

**TECHNOLOGY LEVEL (We are using the Civ 5 General Scale here):** Ancient Era (Farming, Archery, Bronze working, Sailing, Writing, Etc) with ritualistic magic influences.

## **SUMMARY:**

In the swamps of a temperate zone, where the winters freeze the murky waters, and the summers sting with mosquitos and heat, the tribal folk of this kingdom make their home.

These tribes are tight knit, and of all of the recognized kingdoms in the world theater, this is the only one with no discernable system of government. To an outside observer, the tribes exist autonomously and appear to be living in a state of cooperative anarchy. The reality is much more complex.

Each tribe has its own rules and tenets that govern their daily lives. Each tribe has a shaman to which they look for guidance, and a chief who leads until the next chief takes over. Most tribes have a rule of combat, where any youth of fighting age can challenge the chief for command of the tribe, but through all of that, the shaman, who can be male or female, truly makes the decisions for the community.

Ritualistic magics are the byword in this kingdom, where disease and danger can run rampant in the murky swamps. The shaman trains apprentices, who assist as medicine men and women. Blood magic is perfected here, and often scares outsiders who view the rituals as evil, or cruel. In fact, it is quite the opposite. A new child is baptized in the blood of the father, mother, and local shaman, all of whom use a ritual knife to draw a small amount of blood and anoint the child's head. Pacts are sealed with blood oaths, leadership is often exchanged with a blood oath, and rituals of protection are done with the freely given blood from members of the tribe, or the sacrifice of animals. It is believed throughout the region that unwilling mortal sacrifices are worse than those of animals, and carry no power. The warriors of the local tribes hunt dark mages who twist the traditions and murder for power. Those who twist the magics find themselves hollow and dark, and are considered as evil to the region as they are by the rest of the world.

The swamps are full of terrifying creatures, huge lizards, dark horrors, and lurking nightmares. This kingdom is its hemisphere's main source of magical creature parts, as well as medicinal plants. The locals are hunter-gatherers, who trade with those brave enough to come to the outskirts of the swamps.

The inhabitants of this kingdom live in homes built high in the trees, or on large, flat platforms made from fallen trees, that float on the surface of the unreliable landscape.

Many from outside this kingdom fear the tribes, for their ways seem strange, and monstrous. The warriors of many tribes believe might makes right, and will raid unsuspecting or undefended settlements on the edges of nearby landmasses. They build long-ships to go explore and bring back things that they are unable to produce or gather themselves.

While this "kingdom" has a representative in the worlds council, though how the leadership is chosen is confusing to all outsiders. Each decade, a new tribe takes leadership of the region, through a long ritual that includes trial by combat, and no tribe may rule twice in a row.

Murder is punished by death, dark mages are punished by burning at the stake, and all other crimes are solved through honor combat. Magic is legal, resurrected individuals are considered otherworldly, and are treated with caution, as most are worried that they have brought back something else with them when they came back from the afterlife.

# The Immortal Halls of Aradiq

**CAPITOL CITY:** Kharamda

**POPULATION:** 30% Anarathi, 20% Elves, 10% Greenskins, and 30% nearly even mix of Humans, Demons, and Dragorians.

## **NOBILITY STRUCTURE:**

**Ranger** – These are trusted emissaries to other clans, and it is considered the height of bad form to raise your hand to a Ranger on a mission of peace. They seek water, food, and allies for their nomadic tribes. (Rank 1)

**Knight** – Knighted by a duke or above, these are defenders of the kingdom. (Rank 1)

**Paladin** – Noble defenders of the tribes, akin to knights. (Rank 2)

**Enchanter** – A noble title granted by the king to a crafter or caster of great prowess. (Rank 2)

**Chiefling** – Heir to a nomadic tribe's chief. (Rank 3)

**Baron** – Landowner/lesser military commander. (Rank 3)

**Seer** – Wise man/woman to a tribe. (Rank 4)

**Duke/Duchess** – Military commander/land owner. (Rank 4)

**Chief** – Leader of one of the nomadic tribes. (Rank 5)

**Prince/Princess** – All non-inheriting children, nieces and nephews of the Emperor. The inheriting child is called the Crowned Prince/Princess. (Rank 5)

**PREDOMINATE STYLE OF DRESS:** Egyptian and Arabic.

**COMMON WEAPONS:** Swords, Knives, Bows and Arrows, Magic, Staves.

**TECHNOLOGY LEVEL (We are using the Civ 5 General Scale here):** Renaissance era (Gunpowder, Banking, Printing Press, Navigation, Astronomy) Magic highly present.

## **SUMMARY:**

This kingdom sits nestled in the center of a desert landscape, bordered by mountains. Due to the proximity to the equator, and the massively nutrient starved sand, this region has stayed mostly barren, despite boasting not one, but three rivers. For centuries, only the nomadic tribes of predominately Anarathi and Greenskins called this place home. Mostly due to the bleak living conditions, but partly because the desert seemed to be a sink for spirits and ghosts.

The tribes had always had a heavy spiritual history, with rituals to honor their ancestors, and call upon them for guidance. It was not uncommon for a clan to leave an area inhabited by a vengeful ghost, or move to an area at the suggestion of a friendly spirit. Many traveled up and down the various rivers over the course of the seasons, staying just far enough from the river to avoid the large creatures who congregated there, while staying close enough to benefit from having water and creatures to hunt.

Then came a new tribe, led by elves, made up by a few races, who were drawn to the desert by the spirits. This tribe believed that the spirits could be harnessed, that the magic and energy of the desert could help them live forever. They settled in the midst of an island made by the three rivers, and began to build structures designed to harness the spiritual energy of the desert. Other tribes grew concerned, but as the new comers were not aggressive, they let them be.

Decades passed, and the structures grew more elaborate. Great temples, huge pyramids, towering obelisks and intricate ziggurats sprouted like weeds. Bridges of stone began to cross the rivers, and a society was built up in the middle of the rivers. This society has been bent on living forever, and preserving the mind. They have crafted a special style of gem that completely store the mind and soul of someone upon their deaths. Leaders, rulers, scholars, spiritualists, and anyone of import has their mind and soul stored in such a gem, many of which are kept in a Temple of Ancestors, a large stone library in the main city. Anyone can come to the temple to ask advice or simply to talk to those interred within. Families can pay to have their loved one's mind and soul stored in smaller gems upon death, though the cheaper versions can only speak to one person, bound to them upon crafting.

Many researching immortality are convinced that the body, mind and soul together are needed to achieve eternal life. As such, they go to great length to preserve the bodies and store them in elaborate tombs. There are instances of local, malicious spirits inhabiting the bodies and going on shambling, undead rampages, though these are rare.

The spiritual tribes are at odds with the cities, believing them to be blaspheming against the natural order. They believe that the perversion of the spirit, when it is stored in the gems, not only angers the natural spirits of the desert, but will bring about the eternal damnation of all who partake. Occasionally shipments of gems are disrupted, river creatures are magically enhanced and sent to wreak havoc on the cities, or tombs on the outskirts of the cities are raided. Conversely, it is not uncommon for the police force of the cities to raid nearby encampments of

the tribal spiritualists, or to infuriate the spiritualists by entrapping local spirits to test their spirit magics.

The spiritualists have a close relationship with the landscape and the spirits that dwell there. Their ceremonies draw in benevolent spirits, and they will ask for help or guidance often. It is not uncommon for the spiritualists to call upon spirits to grant them knowledge, or even to offer their bodies for possession in order to accomplish a task, or reward a friendly spirit for their help.

The one thing that both parties agree on is that Resurrection is illegal. The spiritualists believe it goes against the natural order, and that it not only angers the spirits, but damages your chance to re-join the spiritual cycle. The ritualists believe that each resurrection damages your soul, weakening it bit by bit. As such, upon death your soul can be stored, or you can simply die.

Theft is illegal in the cities and the tribes. Murder is illegal in the tribes, but assisted suicide is not illegal in the cities. The elderly or sick will occasionally choose to die and have their death be at the hands of trained ritualists, ready to store their soul with no issue. Because souls move on so quickly, you have a small window after death in which you can store the mind and soul, and being able to plan your death helps ensure that you will live forever.

In the cities you can be arrested for crimes, and some crimes are so heinous that a sentence of Eternal Torture can be enacted. Your spirit is stored, and the gem is placed in a temple dedicated to tormenting the souls. In the tribes, the worst punishment is exile, never to have your soul rejoin those of your family.