

LANDS OF LORE

THE THRONE OF CHAOS

THE HISTORY OF
THE LANDS OF LORE

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PEOPLES OF THE LANDS

While state diplomats are quick to point out that there are many sentient creatures inhabiting the Lands, the fact of the matter is that since the Heritical Wars only four races survived with any semblance of control over their own destinies. These races--Humans, Huline, Thomgog, and Dracoids--have been known since then as the Ascendant Races. They lead the White Army Alliance in the fight against the Dark Army.

Though most of the citizens of Gladstone are Human, individuals from all four of the Ascendant Races call themselves subjects of King Richard.

DRACOID



Dracoids look like humanoid lizards. Most other races find them repulsive. To others, there's very little appealing in Dracoid "culture."

A sure way to start a fight with a Dracoid is to tell him a variation on the joke about how his race got started. Popular myth holds that the Dracoid race is "half Human, half dragon." Actually, Dracoids probably have no relation to Humans. The dragon part, however, is more likely.

Dracoids have an assortment of interesting and disgusting tricks to help them cope with this inherently hostile environment. Their forked tongues, webbed digits, double eyelids, and the ability to spit venom are usually sufficient to stave off any bar fight.

Dracoids have a natural affinity for magic, being one of the more intelligent races in the lands. Their relatively small strength is due to their strange bone structure, a result of evolution from a species that thought amphibious travel was the wave of the future. The skin, however, is tough and provides natural protection.

As cold blooded as they are, Dracoids have strong emotions. They happen to take their responsibility to their own kind very seriously. This principle, of course, has no bearing in their relations to other races. Dracoids, on the whole, treat members of other races, on the whole, like dirt.



HULINE

Hhe Huline are a race of sentient hominid felines. Like Humans, there are some variations on the main race. Members of the dominant strain look like giant bipedal domestic cats, standing a bit shorter than the average human. Their coloring and fur patterns vary wildly, and learning how to read their body language--curling tails, twitching whiskers, and swiveling ears--is an ancient art, utterly incomprehensible to most other races. They aren't as strong as Humans, but are much more agile.



It may be that the Huline developed a language only to communicate with other races. Most of the Huline have difficulty grasping the intricacies of spell-casting. This is probably due to having waited so long to develop a language. They have problems comprehending many magical abstract concepts and don't work well with symbols. Without opposable thumbs, they also have a little trouble with magic wands.

Huline communities are well-developed, civilized areas. Social niceties must be observed or you might as well be one of those "wild ones who hunt in the jungle."

HUMANS

It hardly seems an accident (no matter what the Dracoids maintain) that Humans rose to become the most dominant race in the Lands. Of the Ascendant Races, Humans have proven themselves to be most adaptable to various ecologies and climates. Humans are the most populous sentient race in the Lands, though there exist many variations and many separate cultures throughout the Lands. In Gladstone itself, Richard and his royal line are Humans, but nobles of other races, most frequently Thomgogs and lesser Huline, petition to become Richard's citizens.

The Humans of Gladstone are a simple but brave folk. It is through their steadfastness that the Dark Army has been kept at bay for so many years.

Scholars from other races, speculating on the Human problem, reassure themselves that even if the Humans were to continue to proliferate at their current rate, they have splintered into too many different tribes, pretending irreconcilable differences, to be considered a real threat. It is axiomatic that a Human will fight no fiercer than against one of his own kind. However, the Humans of Gladstone have always been united against the Dark Army under the leadership of the ancient royal line.



THOMGOG



he four-armed Thomgogs pride themselves on their cult of mysticism and philosophy of universal brotherhood.

When a Thomgog "dies," the "soul" leaves the dead body, becomes a "seed" that takes root in fertile soil, and about a year later reincarnates into a new, young Thomgog. The full details of Thomgog reproduction is one of the Great Mysteries of the Lands, but it's enough to know that there's no way to actually kill a Thomgog. A Thomgog will simply reincarnate with a new body and sometimes a healthy resentment for whatever killed it in the last incarnation.

This, scholars believe, is why Thomgogs developed such forgiving natures--or, at least, why they developed such a philosophical lifestyle. The reasonable and enormously patient Thomgogs are valued throughout the Lands as diplomats, negotiators, and arbitrators.



Because of their great strength and their two extra arms, Thomgogs are also very highly regarded warriors. This might be the real key to their success as diplomats. As the axiom says: "Speak softly, and have a Thomgog at your side."

CHRONOLOGY OF THE LANDS



UNKNOWN BEGINNING

Not much is known of the period when the Powers-That-Were presumably created the Lands. Few of the "higher" races address this topic in their histories or mythologies. Most chronologies begin with the Golden Age and the Ancients. Anything before that was dark, mysterious, scary and not to be talked about.



GOLDEN AGE

The time of the Ancients is known as the Golden Age, a period when the Ancients roamed the Lands and held dominion over all. Most races considered this their genesis and the Ancients their gods, benevolent or otherwise. During this period of "golden peace," the races did not want, they did not war, and the Ancients provided for all.



WAR OF THE HERETICS

Of uncertain origin, this War of the Heretics precipitated the fall of the Ancients. It is not known who started it all, between whom and for what cause it was fought. Many believe this dark war began as a conflict between two Ancients of terrible power and malicious intent.

During this period the Lands plunged deep into anarchy. This war wiped out many of the normalizing advances of the races, set up the beginning of the Dark Army and unleashed wild magics upon the Lands. The Ancients were wiped out and became a myth.

The War of the Heretics is a foil to the Golden Age: it makes any age look good and golden in comparison. In older books and lore, this is also sometimes called the Hunting, or the Great Hunt -- depending on the perspective.



ARK TIMES

After the fall of the Golden Age, the world was plunged into darkness. The races reverted to their primitive state, the Ancients having annihilated one another. No formal relations existed between the various races. Trade was virtually non-existent.

In the lore of several races, however, this was also the time of great travelers, individuals who wrote of strange lands and stranger adventures. During this convenient stagnation, had the world not been so boring, the travelers' tales would not have been that interesting. Also, presumably, hitherto unknown great mages were building up their power to legendary stature relative to the pathetic efforts of primitive witch doctors practicing at the time.

This was a period of great romance, with all discoveries new and fantastic against a rather gray backdrop of existence. Compared to what the individual races throughout the Lands would later encounter and live through, there's really nothing that spectacular about the Dark Times at all. Since so few things were written down, works like "The Traveler's Tales" and the first magic albums of Bannon Mastercraft seem like miraculous achievements, created in a void.

Because of the restlessness of the travelers, this period is also called the Wandering.

It was a time of legendary individuals making strives, but a period of little civilization advancements.



RACIAL WARS

The Racial Wars were actually a long series of wars, not really related to one another, which spanned at least a millennium. A relatively minor war started them all, but it served to draw out the races and get them communicating, trading, and warring. By this time, most of the higher races had advanced to a point where war could actually be fun and profitable.

Again, depending on the perspective, this is sometimes called the Expansion or the Time of Tears. The Lands were as a big board game. Territory was lost and gained, changing too frequently for contemporary historians to sort out. Most of the higher races won as much as they lost. Some races were completely transplanted to different Lands, forced to migrate through subsequent conquests and expulsions.

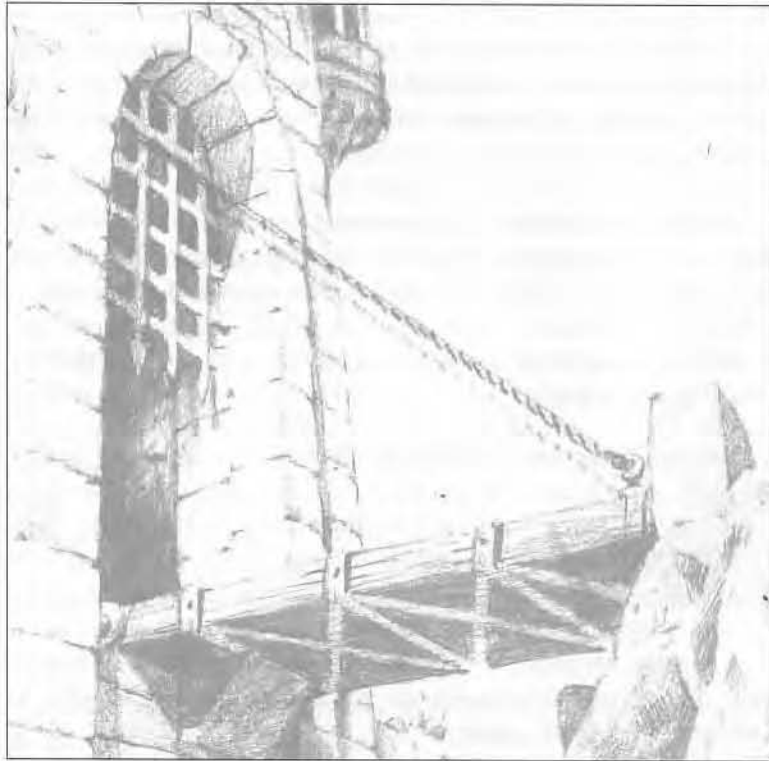
During this period, a number of tribes were wiped out. This constant turmoil, however, brought out the best in the surviving races. The ultimate result was that the "higher" or "Ascendant" races -- being the Humans, Dracoids, Huline and Thomgog in the upper continent -- established dominion over the Lands.



RISE OF THE DARK ARMY

In the aftermath of the Racial Wars the Dark Army marched forth from the Mouth of Ruin and attempted to ravage the good peoples of the Land. Who knows where the evil impetus of the Dark Army originated? Perhaps the Dark races were just a little bit more crude, more primitive and less loved. The Dark Army welcomed all who wish to participate in establishing the Regency.

The seeds of the Dark Army were planted long, long ago, during the War of the Heretics, or possibly even during the Golden Age. Early incarnations of the Dark Army did some damage, but record-keeping wasn't in vogue back then; when entire civilizations are being wiped out by natural and unnatural causes, no one thinks to keep track of uniform insignias. The early Dark Army was responsible for a number of atrocities during the Dark Times, and it is likely that one of the factions during the War of the Heretics was also an early incarnation.



BEASTS IN THE LANDS



Amazons

Amazons attack twice as fast as most other warriors, but they wear little armor and are vulnerable to the cold.

Apparition

When you come upon an apparition, flee! Spells and weapons only pass through them. It would require a special magic to banish these horrors.



Archer Slugs

When threatened, archer slugs fire poisonous darts. Large blunt weapons are especially effective against these dangerous creatures.

Avian Worms

Squirmish avian worms are difficult to hit with most conventional combat weapons. Worm hunters will have much better luck relying on their spellbooks.



Bandit

All thugs want to be bandits when they grow up. Bandits brandish better weapons, wear better armor, and are better at "thugging," in general, than thugs.

Boars

Large wild boars roam the forests of Gladstone. Huntsmen have always favored thrusting weapons against these vicious beasts.



Boglytes

Boglytes are animated swamp muck. If you cannot avoid these creatures while travelling in the swamps, take a good mage with you who knows what to do with a Freeze spell.



Cabal Warriors

Cabal warriors make up the more elite arms of the Dark Army. They're tough, they're excellent swordsmen, and they will not flee. Local wags insist that cabal warriors will continue to fight even after death-but that's just silly superstition, right?

Cave Dwellers

Cave dwellers are primitive humanoids who lurk in the caves near Gladstone. They move very slowly but pack quite a wallop behind those huge clubs they like to drag around.



Flying Spiders

The bite of a flying spider quite painful and is often poisonous. A good Fireball spell-and a good supply of medicinals-is recommended.

Gorkha

The Gorkha are excellent warriors, especially when fighting in their native swamps. They are particularly susceptible to impaling damage. Gorkha have a strong resistance to magic attacks.



Hornets, Giant

The giant hornet's sting can pierce even the stoutest armor. Fire is fairly effective against them.

Iron Grazer



When these metal scavengers drool, its not only gross, but it also can destroy metal weapons and armor. Attack them at a distance if you want to keep that nifty sword of yours.

Lizards, Giant

Giant lizards have prehensile tongues which can grab weapons and items out of their opponents' hands. It is best to use blunt weapons against these beasts.



Minotaur

A minotaur not only has a bad complexion and a pretty ugly family tree, but his singing voice-well, his roaring, actually-can inflict tremendous damage. Don't even try to make friends with this one.

Molder

Molders are hunch-backed rotting corpses. Although they are immune to cold and acid, they don't like fire.



Orc

Orcs are monstrous humanoid creatures with little intelligence. Fighting is all they know. Use blunt weapons against their thick hides.

Orc, Great

Great Orcs are oversized in-bred cousins of the Orcs. It is nearly useless to pound on their massive frames with blunt weapons.





Pentrog

Pentrogs aren't as tough as they look. Fire is the best way to defend yourself from them.

Ratman

A ratman's claws may inflict toxic wounds that quickly festers. If you encounter one of these abominations, strike quickly with an bladed weapon.



Scavenger

Scavengers shoot sticky webs to trap their victims. Their thick, scaly hides make them virtually fireproof, but they abhor the cold. Hacking away at them with edged weapons does little damage; large bashing weapons are more effective.



Thug

Thugs frequenting the paths of the Northlands are common street thieves and robbers. They usually arm themselves with clubs and maces.



Wraith

The wraiths of the White Tower have kept away tourists for years. If there is a way to defeat them, it is certainly not by cold steel or common magic.



Magic in the Lands

Spellbook recipes for the common caster. These rudimentary spells are available to most citizens who have a basic understanding of the magical elements, some time to spend developing their magic skills, and a spellbook.

Heal

The basic *Heal* spell will usually restore health to an injured person. This spell works on most higher, sentient races. However, not even the most powerful mages have been able to raise the dead with *Heal* -- so don't try it.

Spark

Spark discharges a small electrical shock from the hands of the caster. Basic as it is, *Spark* is still a very handy spell to know in dangerous Lands.

Fireball

This spell unleashes fiery orbs into the spell-caster's field of vision, striking whatever is in range. It is, alas, probably the most popular spell in times of war, as some fire-scarred landscapes attest.

Freeze

This spell lowers the local temperature below freezing level. This is a popular household spell used to preserve food. Some malcontents, it has often been reported, employ this spell for more destructive uses.

Lightning

When *Lightning* is cast a powerful electrical jolt will strike directly in front of the caster.

Mists of Doom

Mists of Doom calls upon the ancestors of the caster to rise from their ancient graves and destroy his enemies. (One is, presumably, on good terms with said ancestors.) Disrespectful, but very useful in a tight spot.

LORE OF THE LANDS

Urbish Mines

PLACE OF RICHES, MOUTH OF RUIN

For generations, before the Urbish Mining Co. had been set up, the Urbish caves had been a trap for heroes, especially the dungeon-pillaging breed. The Urbish caves had always yielded riches. If you went down in the caves, you could always find wonderful treasure. But you always found horrible danger, too. The place was cursed! Folks call it the Mouth of Ruin. Of the few people who ever made it back to the surface, most came back insane, or horribly diseased, or even undead.

VAELAN'S KEY

However, perhaps four or five generations ago, the incredible Vaelan of the Sidari descended the Mouth of Ruin. Seven years after he had been given up for dead, he came back up again. Alive, sane, and very, very rich. He never spoke of his encounters or experiences in Urbish caves, but he claimed that he could always return to the caverns safely. He proved it, going down often and returning loaded. He claimed he knew a secret way to tame the demons, but this secret...well, he kept secret.

But Vaelan kept coming back up again, and with such riches!

Whatever power Vaelan held over the demons of the caves, he didn't hold it over the men of the Lands. Humble Vaelan, who survived seven years in the caves, didn't last one year back among his own people. He was murdered for possession of this secret.

The Laird of House Urbish, on whose fief the caves were located, claimed not to be responsible for Vaelan's murder. Of course not. When the Laird wound up with the secret to the caves however -- well, what could one say? The Laird claimed a legal right to the Vaelan's secret (which became known as Vaelan's Key, though no one has ever confirmed whether this was an actual, physical key), as the caves were legally the Laird's property, as Vaelan had no heirs.

Urbish Mining Company

He Laird himself, armed with Vaelan's Key, descended, disappeared for a fortnight, and came back -- pale, scared, and half out of his wits. After recovering, he revealed no treasures -- but he's a Laird, so who can say what he really had? Apparently, he found *something*, because he set up the Urbish Mining Company and began stripping the upper levels of the Urbish Mines with the obsession of a madman.

Under the Urbish Mining Company, the Mouth of Ruin never turned up anything as wonderful as Vaelan's treasures, but it did yield rich ores beyond the capacity of any other mine in the history of the Lands. Surprisingly, the Laird had no trouble finding willing workers despite the horrific past of the Urbish caves. Greedy people flocked to Urbish from throughout the Lands, always certain that they would be able to sneak out a few nuggets, or gems, or whatever else the mines yielded without the overseers ever catching sight.

(This great migration of peoples from across the Lands explains how Gladstone and surrounding lands came to have such a diverse population.)

The Laird was rich, and his foremen were rich, and even the immigrants who traveled leagues to slave in the Urbish

Mines were rich from the gems they smuggled from the Mouth of Ruin. But they, were also undeniably cursed.

Whatever Vaelan's secret was, apparently the Laird of House Urbish didn't quite get it. People said that the Laird's heart wasn't as pure as Vaelan's, and so couldn't withstand the evils of Urbish. The people were peasants, so what did they know? After the mining began, however, the House Urbish suffered disaster after disaster after horrible disaster. The House fell not even three generations after the mining began.

The miners themselves? Many disappeared, and it was said that they strayed from the protection of Vaelan's Key (whatever it was) to find more riches deeper in the mine. Other miners, it was said, turned into monsters, horrid creatures who haunt the woods surrounding Urbish yet today.

Eventually, the mines were abandoned. House Urbish was no more.



ANCIENT TEMPLES AND OTHER CURSES

Lore has it that at the very heart of Urbish is an ancient priests' temple, and it is here that the cursed Nether Mask could be found. It is also said that this was but a part of the great civilization of the Ancients, from whence (it is said) the Draracle originated.



Not that anyone -- with the possible, recent exception of Scotia -- has ever penetrated this fallen city. Indeed, fact of its existence properly belongs in the realm of rumor.

While there has always been strange activity around the Urbish caves, these hauntings have escalated dramatically since Scotia removed the Nether Mask from Urbish. Whatever magical barrier protected the fallen ancient city has been shattered. Once Scotia broke it to take the Nether Mask, anyone could get in -- and anything could get out.



THE DRARACLE



he Draracle has served the peoples of the Lands for many generations as an oracle and seer, giving (often at a very high price) precious advice without which the petitioner could survive or prosper.

This creature lives under Mount Margor, bordering the kingdom of Gladstone. The caverns underneath Margor are hazardous, dark, dank, twisty and probably full of poisonous gas. It is guarded by several monster sentries and many obviously manufactured traps that often prove lethal to the would-be spelunker.

The term "Draracle" is a vulgarity, signifying what ultimately the so-called Ascendant races valued of this ancient, reverent creature: a dragon oracle. It is little wonder, then, the contempt this "Draracle" shows for supplicants and petitioners!

Local lore says he only grants his prophecies to those who bring him great treasures, though he obviously has no need for such lavish wealth. The Draracle's great wisdom and knowledge, as far as is known, has never failed a petitioner.