

Descriptions of Valenor from

The Age of the Storm

By

Mike Pohjola

English Translation by

Elina Pekkarinen
Juhani Laiho
Anna-Maija Ihander
Jenni Kirves

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NATHAR

The culture of the nation of Nathar resembles that of many European nations in the early Middle Ages, but is not based on any of them. For example, in the religion, references to old Finnish as well as ancient Roman myths can be found. On the other hand, attitudes towards life, the perception of time, the perception of humanity and such are closer to the present day than the past.

THE SHAPE OF THE WORLD

In the middle of the world of Valenor lies the continent of Almon that is surrounded by water. In the centre of the continent lies the Mountain of Gods that carries the Celestial Dome. The gods live above the Celestial Dome, and that is also the place of the Sun, which is time, and the Moon, which is where the dead go.

The roots of Valenor reach far under the continent, turn eventually into rock and finally into molten lava. Underneath all is the underworld, the Abyss, inhabited by pyras and the creatures they torture. If one digs a hole deep enough in Valenor one may end up in the Abyss. On the other hand, sometimes pyras find their way to the surface and come tormenting the inhabitants of Valenor.

Outside Valenor, far away in the west lies the Land of Sunset, or the Land of Dusk, while far away in the east lies the Land of Sunrise, or the Land of Dawn. Together they form the Lands of Twilight, from where the elves have come to Valenor. It is said that one can take the sunpath to the Lands of Twilight, but no one has ever returned to tell the tale whether or not anyone ever succeeded in doing so.

Outside Valenor there is yet another place, called the Rainy Islands. Inhabited by creatures of magic and dreams, one can get there by walking along the rainbow. Some people end up there in their sleep; others draw power from the place. The silent ones and the dragons have come to this world from there. Sometimes parts of the magic of the Rainy Islands ooze visibly to Valenor, and this is how Northern lights are created.

The Celestial Dome, the Abyss, the Lands of Twilight and the Rainy Island surround Valenor, whose inhabitants – people and orcs – have constantly dealings with these powerful outside forces. Many religions and kingdoms have risen and fallen from the influence of those powers, but the race of men still continues living in Valenor.

Lands of Nathar

The lands of Nathar are mostly wilderness: forests, meadows, stone fields, rocks, rivers and lakes. Here and there, especially along the rivers, there are villages and towns of men, the surrounding forests having been cut down or burn-beaten for cultivation. These places are connected with roads that are often unsafe, but since the revolution, the main roads have usually been secured by imperial soldiers.

Traces of living can be found on the mountains, hills and rocks. Some ancient people have dug dwellings in the rock, some of which are primitive hollows, others richly ornamented caverns. Sometimes people and orcs find safety in these caves, but pyras also often use them to find their way from the Abyss to the surface and live in them when not tormenting people.

Here and there in the wilderness one may also come across flat rocks and glacial boulders, which many people believe to possess some secret meaning. It is true that many nature spirits like to visit these regions, and the people who live in those parts make offerings to win their favour.

Nathar is a remnant of the vast Empire of Nathos which all towns of men belonged to some centuries ago. Nathar is the greatest of the remaining realms, its south eastern neighbour Dantos being the second greatest. In the north, beyond the Wolf Sea, lies Gethar that guards the northern wilderness, and in the west, lies the dreaded island kingdom of Cruinne. In the south lie the abundant country of Eksos and the kingdom of Miran, famous for its wizards.

Outside these countries live the bestial orcs, the magic-using silent ones and the mysterious elves. The wilderness is inhabited by orcs, elves and sometimes pyras, which makes it difficult to expand human settlement.

The situation in the Empire

Sixteen years ago Nathar was ruled by King Aldrion VI the Wise. However, the seven-year reign came to a sudden end, when a mysterious nobleman and wizard Zangavius had the king killed and seized power. Zangavius had a wide support among the nobility, and he reintroduced the old imperial title dubbing himself Emperor Zangavius I the Great.

The revolutionary fights continued for several years, and there are still counts and dukes here and there who would like to see Zangavius removed. Saying such things aloud, however, would make the speaker a traitor and an outlaw, and he would be executed or banished.

The emperor has strengthened the army, raised taxes and improved the position of townspeople in relation to peasants. These decisions were resisted at first, but the silent ones living in the southeast have declared war against the human kind, and the army has come in useful. The man-inhabited country of Dantos has already fallen before the invincible army of the silent ones, and it is perhaps only the emperor's foresight that keeps Nathar protected.

SOCIETY

Nathar consists mostly of forests and countryside, but there are also towns here and there. Monsters, outlaws and travellers roam the forests. The villages and farms of the countryside are inhabited by small numbers of farmers and hunters dressed in patched green and brown clothes. After the day's work they make handicrafts and try to practise their fighting skills, for they never know when they will have to defend their homes against restless dwellers of the wilderness.

The society is based on feudalism, which means that every village is governed by a count – usually a former knight who has received some land from his master. The villagers pay taxes to the count, who in exchange protects the villagers from outlaws, pyras, orcs and other monsters. In order to do this, the count sometimes has to hire mercenaries and adventurers, and sometimes he may call other knights for help. Nowadays also the imperial army is powerful and defends the villages it stays in. In exchange, every man of age in every village has to serve in the army for five years.

Peace is also threatened in the north by barbarian tribes and pirate ships from the Badlands, in the east by the monsters of the Dark Forest and lately in the south by raiding parties from Dantos and the dangerous silent ones. Life can be said to be peaceful only in the southwest of Nathar, and therefore all major towns are situated there.

Formed around trade places, castles or large villages and scattered around Nathar, the towns are inhabited by craftsmen, traders, nobility and their servants. Farming and keeping cattle are important subsidiary trades, and it is common for even the poorer townspeople to keep cattle, poultry and other domestic animals. Nearly all houses are made of wood, and fires can therefore be quite disastrous.

The town fair is the highlight of the year's trading cycle and is the occasion of both trading and entertainment. Life in general is centred on trading, and in the eyes of the common people the rich traders are almost equal in status to the nobility regardless of their descent. Until recently, the majority of people from Dantos who lived in Nathar were traders, but nowadays people who have fled from Dantos are mostly peasants.

The majority of population in towns, however, consists of craftsmen and workmen. Craftsmen in a town include, for example, goldsmiths, glaziers, painters, potcasters, barbers, barber-surgeons, tailors, cobblers and tincasters. Workmen, for their part, include carpenters and transport workers such as coachmen and carriers, seamen and the traders' servants.

The nobility and the craftsmen form a small but all the more visible part of a town's population. The nobility holds the highest administrative power, but in many parts rich traders are considerably better off than the nobility. In any case, these two classes together organise feasts of profuse drinking and gorging funded by tax money or trade income swindled out of the common people. And while young men have to serve their country in the army, many of a town's pretty young maids end up as entertainers in the upper class parties against their will.

On the other hand, a good ruler lets his subjects enjoy his success as well. Therefore, in addition to the fair, there are numerous other feasts, such as tournaments, nobility weddings, the harvest festival, solstices, equinoxes, victory celebrations and such that are celebrated by everyone from common people to the nobility. Townspeople can ask for the count's advice in their disputes, and even ask for a

monetary loan. The count often has a personal relationship with the townspeople, since he spends most of his time with them.

Administration

The highest authority belongs to the emperor, who receives his rights directly from the gods. Directly below the emperor are the senate and the princes. The senate consists of twelve senators who, among other things, make decisions about tax collection and give advice to the emperor on domestic affairs. The emperor himself is responsible for foreign affairs and the allocation of tax money. Therefore, the high taxes are the senate's fault, but the roads built and healers hired with tax money are credited to the emperor.

Subordinates to the emperor are also five princes, who each govern their own province. The emperor himself is the Prince of Sondar. Princes take care of administrative matters in their province, collect taxes, maintain their courts and keep their subjects in line. The princes are only responsible to the emperor. Each prince also has some army troops that are responsible for internal security and, among other things, take care of the tax collecting and uphold the law. All royalists have been killed or banished, and nowadays all princes are completely loyal to the emperor.

The emperor is also the commander-in-chief of the army, subordinated by a great number of generals. The emperor tells the armies where to go, when to attack and when to defend, and takes care of the security of Nathar in general. The imperial army upholds the peace and sometimes brings the country glorious victories in battle.

Each province is divided in a few fiefs governed by dukes. In practice, the dukes follow the prince's orders, but have some authority themselves as well. As a rule, the prince is also duke of the largest fief. The duke usually has his own castle or estate surrounded by a village with a smith, an inn and a mill. The castles of the most important dukes are surrounded by entire towns.

Under the dukes in order of precedence are counts, knights, lords and ladies, mayors who are in charge of towns, wizards, the commonalty, captains of the guard, the clergy, state officials and tradesmen. Townspeople are more important than the otherwise equal peasants.

Knights act as sheriffs or commanders in the army, making a military career being the only way for common people to gain nobility. Village chiefs, lagmen, landowners and scholars are often quite high up in the hierarchy as well, even though they do not have an exact position outside their community. At the bottom of the hierarchy are common people – workers and peasants. In general, common people are indeed people, but sometimes an orc can get lucky and be hired for a while in a village short on labour.

Prisoners of war, criminals and orcs are sometimes kept as slaves belonging to their masters. Slaves can not own anything, but their master has a duty to feed them and provide them with accommodation. Slaves can escape from their masters, but this usually only makes matters worse for them, because they are seldom capable of feeding themselves by any other means than stealing.

Pioneers, adventurers, outlaws and orcs inhabit the wilderness. Pioneers and orcs usually farm land by clearing and burning-over woodland and using the field for a couple of years and then moving on. Orcs also often raise pigs. These wilderness-dwellers are sometimes hired as hunters or trackers.

The Emperor

Little is known about the background of Emperor Zangavius, who is the sovereign ruling with an iron grip. To an ordinary peasant he is a distant and unreal figure. Many still remember loud talks of how the emperor seized the throne unjustly. The stories, however, have now turned into bitter fairy tales in one place and heroic tales in another. Few people talk about the king nowadays. Instead, most of them wonder whether the emperor really has become one of the gods.

Some say that the emperor is a great wizard who is capable of deeds that an ordinary ruler could not achieve even with the help of armies. They say that Zangavius sees everything, hears the tiniest sounds and punishes his enemies so severely that even death is a relief compared to it.

Many people think the emperor is exactly what Nathar needs: a great ruler who will use his skill to raise Nathar into a new, more glorious bloom, an emperor, who can put things in proportion and who uses power with a heavy hand when it is necessary for the well-being of the empire. For these higher purposes people are prepared to grind their teeth and suffer the military service and high taxes. In return, they will have a country safe from intruders, and even better living conditions, for example, in the form of the Healers' Guild and an improved road network.

Some, however, find Emperor Zangavius's reign hard to cope with. Heavy taxes, long military service and harsh living conditions are wearing down the citizens. Somebody might have had their last sheep taken as payment for taxes; someone else might have lost their only son of working age for years to serve in the military. For some, the losses have been too great to bear. Talking against the emperor, however, is treason, punishable by death.

Some have had to suffer unprincipled officers or soldiers who abuse their position and make people's life hell in general.

When Zangavius seized power he had the king's relatives and closest supporters including the Trodai warriors loyal to the king arrested. There are rumours that the imperial dungeons and the shores of Cruinne could still be full of king's men. The commonalty was naturally executed.

Rebellion

Here and there in forests and remote villages live traitors who rob money transports and attack military camps. Taught to be humble and obedient, the people do not even consider supporting these rebels, let alone joining them. Common people do not dare to support them even in speech, for everyone suspected of rebelling is arrested immediately – and executed, if found guilty.

Zangavius has also attempted to disperse the treacherous Trodai organization that was the former royal guard of the king. The emperor was not completely successful in his attempt: some Trodai warriors still

wander around the empire, and according to rumours, there are still a few Trodai Masters left as well. It is still said that the Trodai carry the Light with them, fight for justice and swear fidelity to the true king and country. It is also said that the Trodai masters still train new warriors and stir up rebellion among the people.

To a common Natharian, however, the Trodai are nothing but stories. Even the few who actually know a Trodai keep quiet, because the entire organisation and its supporters have been declared outlawed.

Law

During the empire of Nathos there were strict laws on what one could do and not do. Those laws still apply in Nathar in principle but their enforcement is not too closely controlled. The basic rule in the Natharian way of life is that you can do anything as long as it does not harm anyone else. Usually the fate of the violator ends up in the hands of the community.

In villages the lagmen and in towns the captain of the guard uphold the law in their area. The captain of the guard has the help of the Town Guard and can also request help from the imperial army. In addition, each fief has a sheriff who, escorted by guards, travels between villages and towns administering justice. A sheriff gets his orders directly from a duke, but the head of all sheriffs in a province is the chief sheriff. A sheriff holds the rank of knight and the chief sheriff the rank of duke.

Killing a person is illegal and is punishable by death. Killing in self defence and sometimes “for safety’s sake” is, however, allowed. People fighting on the side of outlaws, criminals or monsters are considered to have abandoned their community and country and therefore also their right for a secure life. Their lives are worth nothing, and therefore can be killed without punishment.

Orcs, silent ones, elves, pyras and other non-humans are considered equal in worth to animals and killing them is not disapproved of – but not often necessary either, and the creatures are feared as well. However, orcs may be slaves to someone and thus by killing an orc one can end up committing a crime against property. Elves, on the other hand, can be merchants or under some nobleman’s protection, whereupon killing them, legally or not, will lead to punishment. Earlier one could find silent ones as merchants as well, but nowadays they are all soldiers to the enemy and must be killed. Many members of the landed gentry pay a reward for killing a pyra.

In general, every citizen of Nathar has the duty to protect his country from pyras and silent ones, but few have the resources to do that. However, most villages have a gallows, where people who have killed someone will mercilessly end up.

While sheriffs and guards uphold the mundane laws, there are wizard inspectors to uphold the laws of magic. Doing magic is illegal for others than wizards, and they punish illegal magicians severely. It is up to the wizard inspector whether the punishment is death, torture or extraction of magical abilities. Young men and women who have only just received their magical powers are usually punished only by extracting their magical abilities if they report their abilities immediately to an official – although very gifted boys may be told to go and take the wizard test in the Highest Tower. The mundane officials work together with the wizard inspectors reluctantly, perhaps more out of fear than respect.

Lately the senate has passed many new laws. One of the most significant ones is the legal inequality of townspeople and peasants. It has always been clear that the nobility has more privileges than the common people, but now also townspeople have more power than the rest of the people.

A townsman killing a peasant is a smaller crime than a peasant killing a townsman. Correspondingly, while travelling in the countryside, townsmen have a right to demand food and shelter from peasants, but peasants do not have a similar right when visiting towns. The word of a townsman also wins over the word of a peasant in court.

Man and woman

Sexual equality is an unknown and unnecessary term in Nathar. In the countryside, men and women have their own tasks and their own groups, although they do not always stick to them. Women's duty is to raise children and cook, while men do the more physical jobs. If it happens that the man is weak and the woman in a good shape, this can be another way around. Nowadays when all the young men can be in the army at the same time, girls have had to take on men's jobs as well.

In general, young people live quite freely in the sense that they can fall in love with anyone they like. If a woman gets pregnant, it is considered suitable to marry the father. Bastards are considered secondary children.

Most people marry at some point in their life, if not for love, at least to make offspring. Wedding ceremonies are simple rituals, after which the husband and wife move together to a house (or a room).

In marriage, the woman usually adopts the man's name. However, women from prestigious families often keep their family name as a second name. Sex between two people of the same sex is not frowned upon, as long as it is just for fun. The village communities and families do not usually accept gay marriages though, for in that case the couple is considered to have chosen not to procreate (and thus have broken at least against Venita, the goddess of fertility). It is, however, fully acceptable to be married, have a huge flock of children, and then for both of the couple to have lovers of their own sex. People who refuse to have children are despised, and most counts do not want such people living in their villages.

Some official duties are gender-bound. Only young men are recruited in the army in the hope that the women would stay home and take care of the house. Then again, midwives can only be women, and most healers are also women. For unknown reasons, the wizards do not allow women to study in the Highest Tower. In nobility circles, men and women are more equal, and a duke, a prince or a king can be either a man or a woman – only the titles change. Zangavius is the first new emperor and has not named a successor. In the old times there have been both emperors and empresses.

Life and death

People are born, and they live and die also in Nathar, and their gloomy lives are lit by different rituals and feasts. Usually feasts consist of eating and drinking well, dancing, singing and storytelling, falling in love and fighting. Many feasts are related to the sun and the crop, but others are simply related to people's lives.

When a child is born, a naming ceremony is held. In the ceremony, the mother holds the baby in her arms and the father pronounces the name. The ceremony is usually attended by friends and relatives from the nearby regions, and often also by the count of the village or his representative. At the ceremony, people make predictions, give presents and do spells for health and good luck.

The next celebration in a person's life is the coming of age. The feast, simply called the coming of age feast, is held for all the young people of the village who have lived for fifteen winters. The entire village joins the feast. The most important part of the feast for the young people is making their way out of a maze where they are taken. It can be a maze made out of rocks and branches, a sort of a snow castle, a deserted island near the coast of the village or the nearby forest. When the young person finds his or her way back to the village, he or she has become an adult and the celebrations begin. This feast usually takes place in the spring, but in the mid-winter in the north. Having come of age, a person can marry, start a house or be recruited in the army.

A wedding usually involves the families and friends of the couple, a priest and the count. The priest joins the couple in marriage, and the count and the parents give them presents. In the party following the ceremony, plenty of fertility spells are done, and at some point the couple retires to their new house while others continue the party.

The dead are almost always cremated. Pyras sometimes snatch body parts also from dead people, and this can be avoided by burning the bodies. A relatively high platform is made out of thin tree trunks and the body is laid on it. Then the wife, first born child or the lawful ruler says a few words and lights up the pyre. This is usually done in the evening, and the close ones stand beside it until the fire goes out. Then the ashes are buried in the ground.

The souls of the dead travel to the Moon with Golos, the god of death, and settle there either in the Halls of Praise or the Halls of Oblivion. The Halls of Praise are on the light side of the Moon, and it is the place for the righteous, good and noble. There is an endless feast in the Halls of Praise, and everybody wishes they would get there. The Halls of Oblivion, on the other hand, are on the dark side of the Moon and full of the wicked, the cursed and the mean. It is a depressing, sad place that has no joy or light. The Halls of Praise and the Halls of Oblivion are in a constant war with each other, and the phases of the Moon show which side is winning.

Money

Small villages and remote areas live in barter economy. Where there are merchants or fairs, more established means of payment is used. It is almost necessary to use money in larger towns.

The basic currency is Nathos silver thaler, which equals one hundred copper marks. One copper mark buys a sandwich or a glass of mead at an ordinary inn. Two copper marks buy a bowl of soup or a mug of dark ale. A serviceable sword costs over ten silver thalers, a dagger can be bought for five.

A month's pay for hard work is around five thalers. The typical price for room and board for a day (including warm meals and a bed) is around fifteen copper marks. If the worker requires room and board the cost is subtracted from his pay. Usually, however, workers are also given clothes and some money for their own use. In towns, the pay can be as much as ten silver thalers depending on the type of work and the employer.

A typical piecework pay for a mercenary soldier is a couple dozen silver thalers and room and board, but famous heroes can be paid huge heaps of gold, or princesses and half-a-kingdoms. An ordinary adventurer earns little more per month than a worker, since the work is rather seasonal.

Arts and sciences

Literacy is still rare in Nathar. In the countryside, hardly anyone can read or write, and only civilized people can read and write in towns. Reading and writing are a part of the education of noble ladies and scholars, but usually also many noble men and merchants learn to read at least tolerably. In a town or a larger village, there is usually at least one literate person who hires out his skills to others, writing official documents, reading and writing letters etc. Books are rare and expensive, because printing has not yet been invented.

The technological knowledge is, at best, similar to that of Western Europe in the Middle Ages. The Middle Ages spans over a long period of time and no single year can be picked, because Valenor and Europe are two completely different things. Some tasks that otherwise would be impossible can be done by magic, while some things simply have not yet been invented. As a rule, if something would have been possible before 13th century in Western Europe, it is also possible in Valenor.

The scholars of Nathar are gathered in Gaidava, which is where the country's only university is situated. At the Academy of Gaidava, one can study languages, philosophy, mathematics, astrology, theory of magic, physics, alchemy and other scientists' things. Scholarly work is also done in many temples and monasteries, and there are scientists and scholars in most large towns. In the south and especially in Eksos, philosophy is popular among the nobility, and philosophical conversations are ordinary there, often even at the market square.

In Nathova, Sangorn, Margova and Sarkos, there are gymnasiums for the rich and noble youth to learn reading and writing, mathematics and metaphysics. Many continue to the Academy of Gaidava and thus become graduates.

The study of medicine is not highly developed, mostly because healers, blood staunchers and witches could often do more with their tricks than even a skilled physician. Even they can not do everything, though, and therefore each army division has a barber-surgeon in addition to healers.

Barber-surgeons are often self-taught, although some of them may have studied medicine at the Academy of Gaidava. They draw blood, tend to wounds, make medicines, give enemas, heal snake bites and pyra bites and bind up fractures. Most also take care of hair and beards, and some also treat animals.

Dancing, reciting poems, doing theatre, storytelling, playing music and singing are popular everywhere. In the southern towns, also architecture, painting and sculpture are admired. In the north, however, painting and sculpting is mostly used for decorating utility articles and not so much for simply pleasure for the eye. Theatre, storytelling and songs are important ways of transferring folklore, and through them it is possible to express political views as well. Artists are usually travelling entertainers, travelling from village to village and performing both on marketplaces and in the manors of counts and dukes.

At fairs, tournaments and fancy parties, one can also see fire-eaters, jugglers, acrobats, animal tamers, dancing bears and conjurers. Some are able to include magic and divine powers in their shows, and those are the most spectacular shows. There are also a few freak shows that travel around in Nathar. In them one can see clubfoots, captured pyras, bearded women, small dragons or magic consumed leesks.

Supernatural powers

The common people of Valenor are poor, uncivilized, superstitious and sickly, like everywhere. Amongst them, however, live also magicians, pyratongues, divine oracles, blood staunchers, healers, seers and lightsouls who possess powers that separate them from everyone else. They are sometimes called the supernaturals.

To ordinary people, these powers seem as amazing and fabulous as lightnings or solar eclipses, but they do exist in any case. Scholars explain them with natural phenomena, laws of nature and force fields, but they are equally puzzled.

Probably most numerous are the magicians, who have a connection of some kind to magic or wizard powers. The powers usually emerge during adolescence, and according to some, it feels like being blind and suddenly being able to see. Depending on the region, the amount of young people having magic potential can vary for one in a thousand to one in a hundred.

Practising magic is dangerous, and therefore the town wizard or a travelling wizard inspector takes away the magic abilities from most magicians. If magic is let to influence a person freely it takes control and turns him into a leesk, a living ghost possessed by magic.

The most talented men with the gift for magic apply for the Highest Tower to study magic and become wizards. It is known that the Highest Tower changes a person forever, and no-one returns as quite the same person he was before. Through the ages, only a handful of women have been accepted to the Highest Tower, and even they were nobility or otherwise rich.

Some decide to avoid the wizard inspectors and practise magic illegally. They are tutored by witches, who usually live in the wilderness as outlaws. Witches are feared and respected and often they also work as midwives and surgeons in their nearby villages, and sometimes help other supernaturals beside magicians as well.

Divine powers are the powers possessed by nature spirits and gods. Fragments of these powers have also been bestowed on certain people, usually healing powers or the ability to talk to spirits. There is no general name for people possessing these powers, but depending on the type of the gift, they are called

healers, blood staunchers, seers or divine oracles. Divine powers are rare but welcomed: people who possess them are usually in a high position wherever they live. Many decide to become priests, but it is not necessary.

Healers and blood staunchers can join the Healers' Guild, recently established by the emperor, the members of which travel around the countryside or with army units to tend to the sick and wounded. In their home region, healers not only heal diseases and wounds with their hands, but also draw blood, cup and heal snake bites and pyra bites.

Pyra powers are harmful and people possessing them are usually despised and hated. These pyratongues are often killed or driven to the wilderness, which is why not much is known about them. It is known, however, that pyratongues inflict disease and bad luck, as well as are able to talk to pyras. Sometimes pyratongues are able to save their home region by commanding pyras with the help of their gift, but usually they work together with them.

Lightsouls are rare among common people but more common among the nobility. They possess powers of light, in other words elf powers that make anyone possessing them but not practising them somehow more interesting and attractive. Only the outlaw Trodai practise powers of light and can thus become invincible warriors or great mystics. It is difficult to identify lightsouls, except for the Trodai, but exceptionally charismatic people are sometimes called lightsouls.

Languages

The standard language of Almon is Adlic. It is the main language used among men, and most people and places are named in Adlic. All inhabitants of Nathar, whether they are people, orcs or elves, speak Adlic.

In ancient times, people spoke the so-called Old Language, which was sometimes called the Language of the Gods. It used to be the administrative language of the Empire of Nathos, but nowadays only scholars and some nobility can speak it. Ordinary people know some sayings in the Old Language. Many old writings are written in the Old Language, and many noble names are in this language as well. Some ancient nature spirits, pyras and elves prefer speaking the Old Language with people.

Elves speak Elvish amongst themselves, and people do not understand much of it. Some Elvish words or expressions have stayed with the common people in a more pronounceable form. However, some scholars, wizards, Trodai masters or elfminds can speak Elvish.

Villages

In an ordinary village, most of the inhabitants farm the land surrounding the village. If they have time they also hunt and make handicrafts. The village is governed by a count who also has a few knights in his castle. Their job is to protect the village from monsters and raiders. The knights are usually the count's offspring or siblings.

The count's family lives in a manor, accompanied by a bailiff, a cook, a couple of maids, a stable boy and the knights. In addition, there are around ten houses in a village, typically inhabited by a man and a wife, the man's parents and younger brothers, and children. Everyone in the house who can, works on the fields.

The villagers obey the count unconditionally. The count is a childhood friend to many villagers and they trust him as long as he acts fair towards his subjects. One of the villagers is nominated lagman, and his job in the village is to see to that law and order is obeyed in the village. The lagman also helps the count in collecting taxes and recruiting soldiers.

There are usually no smiths or inns in villages governed by a count as in one governed by a duke. Instead, the villagers meet in one of the villagers' house to sip ale together. Also, the count sometimes invites people to a party at his manor.

The count's castle or manor is surrounded by a paling or a wall, behind which there is plenty of room to protect the villagers and their animals.

In addition, in a village there is a sheepfold, in which the sheep graze. Each house usually owns a few sheep. Next to the sheepfold is the village's cow pen, since each house usually also owns a cow. Only the count has horses.

In the middle of a village there is a well or a spring. A little away from the village, usually on a hill, there is a gallows for hanging criminals. Underneath the hill or nearby it is a tomb grove where dead villagers are buried.

APPEARANCE

Few people pay attention to their appearance, but appearances can be quite informative. Peasants, townspeople and nobility, people from south and north, wizards and soldiers, all of them can be identified from a distance by the way they look.

Clothing

In the countryside, in Nathar as anywhere, people dress simply and practically. Trousers, skirts, shirts, vests and tunics are worn regardless of sex. The colours are earthly and modest. During feasts, some wear dresses and capes, but even then, only the wealthiest wear bright colours. Dye is usually made out of berries and roots. Jewellery is a sign of wealth. In the winter, capes, coats and furs keep the cold away. When it is very hot, outside workers often wear simple hats.

Townsmen usually dress more stylishly, usually wearing white shirts and fancy boots, and capes, when it is not too hot. Women usually wear dresses. The wealthiest townsmen try to imitate the way nobility dresses. Wizards usually wear a hooded robe of a single colour; apprentices have black robes, and during their initial years they also wear black gloves and a black scarf to cover the face. Priests usually wear simple robes or tunics and decorate themselves with the symbols of their religion.

In addition to a townsman's outfit, the nobility typically also wear jewellery and brooches, and quite often a decorative headband. The fabrics they use are usually more luxurious – silk, velvet and satin are the best, but expensive. They also wear a signet ring that proves they are nobility.

The colours of the imperial army of Nathar are blue and silver. All soldiers wear a blue tabard embroidered with the white imperial eagle. Officers have a silver or golden eagle.

The colours of the royal army of Nathar were red and silver. Soldiers wore a red tabard embroidered with the royal lion. Officers had a silver lion and the knights of the Golden Lion had a golden one. Nowadays wearing and owning a royal army uniform is punishable by death.

People wear a lot of furs in the north – anyone who can afford it buys a fur of some kind. On the other hand, when the weather is good, they may not wear much. In the summer, people work on the fields wearing only loincloths, in the winter they go hunting wearing thick furs. The jewellery is large and simple. The army of Gethar does not have a uniform, but they fight under a green flag with a red wolf.

People from Cruinne wear a lot of green. Sleeves are usually short or non-existent. People use feathers and bird bones to decorate themselves, and warriors sometimes paint their faces before battle. The heraldic beast of Cruinne is dragon, but the white tunics of the knights carry the red cross of Cruinne.

In the south, clothes are made of thinner materials, often cotton, or silk if one is wealthy. Almost everyone, including children, wears a hat outside, especially in the summer. In and around Dantos, leather and dark colours are in favour. Soldiers from Dantos wear a grey outfit with a black bull.

In Eksos, clothes are even simpler – many wear simply a light coloured cotton robe or tunic and sandals. The heraldic beast of Eksos is goat, and it can be seen embroidered in gold on the purple army and navy uniforms.

Colours are in favour in Miran, and especially the townspeople spend their money on purple, gold, green, red and blue coloured cloaks, vests, hats and shoes. The army of Miran wears green uniforms with a silver unicorn.

Hair and beard

Hair and beard are kept quite short in the countryside, especially if there are diseases, lice or fleas around. Young women are an exception, they keep their hair long – girls wear them untied, girls of marriageable age wear theirs in plaits. Old men often have a full beard as a kind of a sign of importance. Young boys' hair is usually kept short in the summer, but is let grow long and warm in the winter.

In towns and among clergy, women have similar hairstyles as in the country, but men often wear their hair longer, untied or tied back. Most noble men have a bobbed hair. A beard is worn mostly by soldiers, and even they usually shave their cheeks. Their hair is usually short or tied back. During the king's reign, Trodai warriors could be identified for wearing beards that covered the chin and continued around the mouth but stopped before becoming a moustache. Most wizards wear their hair and beard long.

In the north, especially on the Gethar side of the Wolf Sea, beards and hair are long showing joy of life and willpower. The hair can be tied back in one, two or three plaits behind the head. Sometimes the beard is braided as well. The hair is usually blond.

People from Cruinne can be identified by their long hair with plaits on both sides of the head. Beard is worn by only few people, usually noblemen. Hair colours vary in Cruinne, but there are probably more blonds and redheads there than elsewhere.

In southern Nathar and in Dantos, hair is usually dark brown, short among the common people and long among nobility. Men often have a thick or long moustache.

In Eksos and Miran, hair is usually long and black. In Miran, pointed beards and thin, long moustaches are popular, whereas in Eksos, people tend to keep their faces shaven.

CHARACTER

The Natharian disposition is typically proud but peaceful. People do not lose their temper for no reason, but honour and safety must be defended – whether it is their own, their family or their country. Everyone respects a person, who is prepared to die or suffer for his principles, as long as no-one else is endangered by it.

Especially in the west and the south, pride is manifested in boasting and melodrama. Friends and members of family are easily accused of things and people get offended easily. People may boast to strangers or threaten them, which has to be answered back. People who are easily persuaded with big talk are not easily taken seriously. “Are you asking for trouble?” “Eat shit, snotface. I go where I want to.” “This is your last warning, next time there will be a bodycount!” “Couldn't be less scary.” “You know, I've killed more men than you have seen summers!”

In the east, pride is manifested in exaggerated modesty. People are proud of their modesty and despise braggarts. People always put others before themselves. “There you go, if that will do.” “Oh, you didn't have to, not for us.” “It's nothing special, but go ahead and have some.” “You have it so lovely here, our place is not nearly as nice.” “We've been forced to save expenses, the next crop will be poor.”

When facing a big threat, differences are set aside, but they never disappear completely. The ragging continues, and a proper Natharian always tries to kill two birds on one stone, trying to save both his country and his pride. “Hit him!” “I fight better than you anyway!” “Look, you actually hit something.”

“I’ll hit you next if you don’t shut up!” “You could have a chance from the behind.” “You’re always thinking about behinds, aren’t you?”

Serious matters and personal feelings are usually only discussed drunk or after a big shock. In other situations, such conversation may feel awkward. “By the way, are you serious about my sister?” “Why do you wanna talk about that...?” “No, tell me.” “Well yea, of course.” “Do you love her?” “Look, I think we should go over this plan once more.”

Manners

People do not ask for help easily, but if somebody does ask for help, he is not left alone. In the east and the north, asking for help is more difficult, and refusing to give it even harder. People try all means by themselves before asking someone to help them.

In the west and the south, one can very well ask for help already when it seems that it would be easier to manage with two. This is not, however, done too often to avoid appearing weak.

The helped has a duty to support the helper for the duration of the helping. Working together with the neighbourhood is a good example of this, and asking for help for big things is easier anyway, since they are a great reason to have a small village party.

Also, a house-owner has the duty to entertain guests by offering them food and shelter. During the visit, both the host and the guest are bound by visitor’s peace, which prohibits them from harming each other. Only a sworn enemy that one would not let inside your house does not have to be entertained. There is no law on this, but it shows great greed and spite not to let a stranger to stay the night.

Speaking

There are different dialects in different parts of Nathar. There is no standard written language, but people write the way they speak. The dialects can be understood by everyone, and emphatic and colourful language is used.

Swearing consist of different things, such as names of pyras, curses and diseases. “Go to the Abyss” curses the person to the realm of the pyras and is especially intimidating coming from a magician. One can also curse in the name of pyras, devils and tormentors: “By Dugankis!” “Satan!”. More mild expressions include “Plague!”, “Pyr!””, “Poison!” and “Orc!”. One can also swear by gods or curse them: “May the forge of Safanus die!”, “The grave of Solonus!”, “Whore Venita!”, “The raping of Lenos!”, “Waldior’s testicles!”

Gods’ names can also be used in blessings, well-wishing and reflecting surprise. “Holy Makhios!”, “Merciful Venita!”, “Wings of Kuros!”, “Sword of Ersius!”, “Wise Aurora!”, “Safanus bless!”, “Golos have mercy!”.

In insults, witty turns of phrases are most appreciated. If the target of the insult is not even worth the bother, one can use simpler abuse as well: “Shitpants!”, “Son-of-an-orc!”, “Ass!”, “Hunchback!”, “Pyra worshipper!”, “Limpdick!”, “Pisshead!”, “Lardass!”, “Gimp!”, “Flat tits!”, “Filthy elf!”, “Madman!”.

PROVINCES

At its largest, the Empire of Nathos consisted of twelve provinces, each led by a prince. After the civil war, the provinces of Gethar, Eksos and Miran separated and became independent countries. In addition, the provinces of Shados, Malthos and Tanthar in the southeast formed the country of Dantos. After a short war, also parts of Ghedos were turned in to Dantos.

Nowadays there are six provinces in Nathar: Sondar, where the capital of Gaidava is situated; the poor Vakar, the largest and the northernmost; Thelar in the west, the wealthiest and most densely populated; Asghar, which is mostly the Dark Forest and is governed quite independently by wizards; Nodos, where, among others, the Mountain of Gods is situated; and Ghedos, the more densely populated area of which was turned in to Dantos and which on the Nathar side is nowadays mostly forest. In addition, Nathar has colonies on the coast of the Sea of Shadows.

Sondar has close trade relations with both Eksos and Cruinne beyond the sea. Having the imperial palace and the senate, Sondar is a politically important province. In addition to Gaidava, also Sangorn and Sereva are towns in Sondar, as well as the ruined town of Dalor in the Cursewoods. The Prince of Sondar is Emperor Zangavius, but many of the more unimportant tasks end up to the duke of the fief of Gaidava and the mayor of Gaidava, Stratos Gaidavius.

Thelar is the northern neighbour of Sondar and is full of important trade centres. The capital, Tolova, is the most important trade town and port in Nathar, engaged in commerce with Cruinne and Gethar, as well as being the base for the Nathar navy. The Trade Route goes through Thelar as well, stopping also in the trade towns of Nathova and Erkor. In ancient times when Nathova was the capital of Nathos, the king was the Prince of Thelar, but nowadays the position is occupied by the old and absolutely loyal Perikleia the Cold Narathil.

Vakar occupies the entire vast northern coast of Nathar, but has only two towns, the capital Deneva and the slightly larger Ador. Both are important but dangerous trade places, where criminals, barbarians and monsters cause constant worry. Vakar consists mostly of dense coniferous forests and small villages that have to fight cold, hunger and monsters of the wilderness. Vakar is governed, instead of his lost brother Prince Agathos Thalios, by the selfish and short-sighted duke Afadros Thalios. There is no certain knowledge of Prince Agathos’s fate, but it is said that he went off to fight the silent ones some time ago and never came back.

There are no towns in Asghar, but the small villages near the Dark Forest pay taxes to the wizards of the Highest Tower. Asghar is only technically a part of Nathar, since the wizards do not pay taxes to the emperor. Asghar is led by Archmage Onizifor Full Moon Briarius, who is also the head wizard of the Highest Tower.

Nodos is the second largest province occupying the most part of Middle Nathar but also reaching through the Golden River to the shores of the Sea of Shadows. In addition to the Mountain of Gods, Nodos includes a great deal of wilderness and countryside and the temple town of Sarkos that is also the capital of the province. Good connections to the Weeping Sea through the Surge River and to the Sea of Shadows through the Golden River ensure good trade income and prosperity. The province is also quite safe, being surrounded by the other provinces. Nodos is governed by Princess Sofia Veladina. The former prince, the royalist Timon Kassandros is banished in exile on an island at the Sea of Shadows. It is said that he should have been executed, but Princess Sofia considered it inappropriate to have another member of the nobility killed.

Province of North Ghedos

Ghedos was divided in two because of the frontier dispute between Dantos and Nathar. Nathar got to keep North Ghedos, while South Ghedos was turned in to Dantos. Ghedos used to be a wealthy and prosperous province, but its wealthiest towns and best trading places have now long belonged to the kingdom of Dantos.

A while ago, Nathar reclaimed South Ghedos from Dantos to protect it from silent ones. The province of Ghedos was not united, however, and South Ghedos became a grand duchy. Nowadays the only larger town in North Ghedos is Margova, situated at the northern border, and having less than three thousand inhabitants. The province is governed by Prince Dergus the Belligerent Pelorian, who was in power already before the emperor's time and who, during the revolution, fought many of his royalist dukes. The counts of Margova are from the houses of Luvian, Elybrian and Pelorian.

The largest town of Ghedos is Guthmark, situated on the side of Dantos, from where Governor Ezter Briaria governs South Ghedos. The town of Guthmark with its five thousand inhabitants is, however, in principle governed by the Duke and former Prince of South Ghedos, Roderik Pelorian, who is loyal to the King of Dantos. Duke Roderik Pelorian is the son of the Prince of North Ghedos Dergus Pelorian's cousin. Many dukes and counts of South Ghedos are thankful of their rescue by Nathar, but would prefer to be a province of the independent Dantos than a grand duchy in Nathar.

North Ghedos is divided in six fiefs, each governed by a duke or a duchess. The fiefs are Margova, Fastgard, Ghedova, Helmstan, Dernholt and Bralon. Only Margova is a proper town, others are just wealthy villages.

Fastgard is the westernmost of the fiefs and is situated along the Surge River midway between Sereva and Margova. The easternmost part of the Cursewoods also belongs to Fastgard, and a road once led from there westwards to the ruined town of Dalor. Fastgard is governed by Duchess Elena Elybrina, whose counts are from the houses of Elybrian and Veladian.

Ghedova is situated inside the western Smokewood, and nearby there is an iron and copper mine that provides metal to entire Ghedos and even further. Through Ghedova goes the Forest Road, nowadays also called the Sword Road – the road starts in Sereva and ends in Sarkos, but soldiers use it going to Bralon. Ghedova is governed by the absent-minded but gentle duke Diomedes Geryon. However, the counts of Ghedova are mostly from the house of Narathil.

Helmstan is quite a civilized town that has trade relations both with the western Margova and the eastern Sarkos. The Helmstan region is fertile with many prosperous agricultural villages. Helmstan is governed by the stubborn and extravagant duchess Silvia Helmstan, whose dukes are mostly from the houses of Pelorian and Arathuin.

Dernholt is situated in the south, in the fork of the Bird River and Evenriver. Dernholt is Ghedos's southernmost fief and the main source of livelihood there is hunting. Its small subordinate villages also farm burn-beaten land and burn tar. Dernholt is governed by the beautiful and intelligent duchess Doria Pelorina. The counts of Dernholt are from the houses of Pelorian and Veladian.

Fief of Bralon

The easternmost of the fiefs of Ghedos is Bralon, governed by the bitter and proud duke Gaius Petronius. Gaius Petronius is a former landless knight raised to a duke who was smart enough to support the emperor during the revolution. He replaced the old duchess Serovia Luvian, who has now passed on. According to some of her offspring, though, the fief should be theirs.

The small town of Bralon has become an important military base against the fight against the silent ones, because it is situated between Guthmark, the capital of Ghedos, and Barostan, a town taken over by silent ones.

In addition to the capital, the fief includes four villages, three of which are situated on the north side of the Evenriver like Bralon. The fourth one, Evergard, is situated by the Sword Road and is a popular stop. Evergard belongs to the charismatic but megalomaniac count Brutus Narathil.

The westernmost of the villages surrounding the Evenriver is Ramon, governed by the old and weak-willed countess Hera Petronia. The village of Luvianburg, situated between Ramon and Bralon, is governed cleverly by the shamelessly smug wizard-count Teizpes Luvian. The easternmost village Deemark is close to the areas taken over by silent ones, and some of the inhabitants have fled from there. The count of Deemark is the daring and heavily religious Athos Pelorian. The villages are situated a couple of days' journey from each other.

Town of Bralon

The inhabitants of Bralon are mostly peasants. The constant presence of the army and refugees from Dantos has consumed the food supplies, and therefore many have taken up hunting as well. Exports from Bralon are tar, ale and furs, while the main imports are metals, wines and fabrics.

There are approximately one hundred houses in the town, in which live the 800 inhabitants as families. Nowadays there are also constantly two army regiments in town, 150 men altogether. In addition, some merchants and quite a few soldiers pass through the town.

The high priestess of the fief's Dysanionists is Madelgarde Eagless, known for her absoluteness and short temper. Working for the duke is the young and slick wizard Ozrik Sly. The sheriff of the fief of Bralon is Theron Pelorian, an unyielding warrior and a skilled woodsman. The captain of the guard is Melanos Iron, an old warrior covered in scars.

The town is built on the north side of the Evenriver and is divided in four quarters. In the southwest is the dock area with piers, fishermen's huts, warehouses and a mill. In the southeast there is the Nobility Quarter with the duke's castle, the wizard's tower, the temples and the residences of the wealthiest merchants. In the northeast there are mostly residential areas and stables, but most of the quarter is now taken over by the army who have built there a barracks and set up their tents.

The northwester quarter is known as the Handicraft Quarter with a barber, a weaving mill, a bakery, a brewery and a clothes shop. There are also five cobblers, three healers, three furriers, three tailors, two barbers and a mason, a carpenter, a candle maker and a jewellery maker. These people buy their materials from travellers or from local villagers and sell them from their homes or at the marketplace.

Along with the army, a locksmith, a saddlemaker, a butcher and a barber-surgeon have settled in the Army Quarter. The town guard keeps the peace, but in the Army Quarter they have practically no power.

There have long been two inns in the town, The Magpie's Nest and The Mug of Ersius. Earlier wealthy merchants, priests, wizards, guardsmen, servants and craftsmen went to the Ersius in the Army Quarter, while workers, peasants and the rabble went to The Magpie's Nest in the Dock Quarter. Nowadays, however, the army people have more or less taken over The Mug of Ersius, which is why all kinds of people now go to The Magpie's Nest. The Friendly Port, a hostelry in the Handicraft Quarter, used to be simply a place for lodging, procuring and feeding travellers, but it is now expanding into an inn as well.

There is one main road and two important gates in the town. The Sword Road goes to Sarkova and Barostan through the Eastern Gate. Through the Western Gate, the Sword Road goes towards Ghedova, but there is also the Road of Margova that goes northwest towards Helmstan. The Handicraft and Army Quarters are to the north of the road and the Dock and Nobility Quarters are on the south side.

In the middle of the quarters, the Sword Road broadens into a marketplace, where there usually are some peasants and craftsmen selling their products. Sometimes merchants from further away stay a while on the marketplace selling beautiful jewellery, mysterious objects and exotic delicacies. Once a week the marketplace gets busier, and after harvest there is a huge feast in Bralon, attended by one and all from the surrounding areas.

Surrounding the town is five kilometres of fields, but only on the north side of the Evenriver. The other side belonged to Dantos until recently and is not yet cultivated. The land there is good though, and many consider it rightful to start cultivating it now that South Ghedos is a grand duchy of Nathar. More crops are needed badly in any case, which is a good incentive to start bending laws.

HISTORY

History is written in Nathar mainly in the Academy of Gaidava – perhaps also in the Highest Tower. On the other hand, old times live in people's minds through fairy tales and stories, even though they may change according to who is telling them. The basic facts of history, however, remain the same throughout the country.

The birth of the world

First there was the eternal winter. There was no sun and no moon. It was an endless, cold darkness. Gods lived among the ice waging war against the pyras, and the father of the gods was called Makhios, and the master of the pyras was called Dugankis. Eventually the gods beat the pyras, and the ice plain was empty and void. Each day was the same. The gods saw that this was not good.

And so Makhios tore a hole in the sky and let the sunshine in. The rays of the sun hit the ice, and it melted and became a huge pond. The sun continued shining, and the water became the first sea. Then Makhios took the legs of Dugankis and made the first fish out of them. The other gods did the same with the other pyras.

Next Makhios took the hands of Dugankis and made the first birds to fly in the air. And the other gods did the same with the other pyras.

Then Makhios took the body of Dukankis, tore it in two and made the first land animals. And the other gods did the same with the other pyras.

And the gods saw that it was good. The glaciers and icy waters were teeming with life, with animals big and small, flying and walking, swimming and immobile. This continued for a long time.

The creation of man

Still the gods saw that something was missing. None of the creatures of the earth reminded the gods of their feats. None of the creatures were created as their own image. So then Makhios took the head of Dukankis and created Man. And other gods admired his work.

The Man walked the icy plains and received many gifts from the gods. He received the ability to think, the ability to speak and the ability to name things. And so the Man named all the fishes in the sea, all the birds in the sky and all the animals on the glacier. And the Man named the world Valenor, which means The Land of Light.

The Man was assigned the task of ruling over all the animals and take advantage of them as he saw fit. And the Man felt good. But he was alone.

And for the first time during the creation, Makhios was at a loss. But then came Venita, the wife of Makhios, and observed that the Man had no mate like all the animals and gods. And so Venita created a mate for the Man, and the Man named her Woman and himself Man.

And so the Man and the Woman lived happily together for a long time. They had children and grandchildren, who each chose a trade for themselves and started families of their own. They built villages and towns and hunted animals. And so the race of men was born.

The early days

Then the pyras started to come back to life. The war of the gods started again, and it was no longer safe for men to live on the ice plains, now turned into a battlefield. So Makhios removed the ice coat from the south and created forests to fell, plants to cultivate and berries and fruit to eat. And so the people moved to the land appointed to them by the gods.

But the pyras were not satisfied. Dugankis, the master pyra, created wild beasts as his image. He created orcs and elves, silent ones and gnomes and sent them to inhabit the forests and wastelands, and set an eternal hatred between men and the children of the beasts.

But men were strong, and they were under protection of the gods. Rocks were quarried, forests burned, villages and towns built and wars waged. Soon all of the known Valenor was occupied by men.

Small city states and village communities developed into countries, small kingdoms fighting with each other for one frontier or another. The barbarians living in the Badlands of the north sometimes attacked men, and they were afraid of unknown creatures living in the dark of the murky forests and created by the beasts.

Eventually, the small kingdoms united through wars and treaties and formed the great Empire of Nathos. The long golden age of Nathos began. Roads were built, towns and schools established, and army troops defended the Empire against aggressors. Peace was great and the people lived in abundance for many centuries.

Other peoples, however, were jealous of the abundance of Nathos. In the east, hatred for men brewed in the minds of silent ones. In the south, the orcs were planning on a war against the Empire in the north. The worst of all was Cruinne, created with the help of renegade men. Situated beyond the western coast of Nathos, the small island of converted men, elves with dark souls and pyra sympathizing orcs was still fighting Nathos. Through the ages the old inhabitants of Cruinne attracted on the island witches and beggars, thieves and robbers, cut-throats and criminals, who were in trouble with the Empire of Nathos.

The war

The emperors in charge of Nathos, however, were not happy with the idea that some were prepared to betray their country because of that island of renegades. So the Empire gathered a great army and attacked Cruinne. When the war had been going on for some time it became apparent that Cruinne could not win with their small army and primitive weapons. They had to buy their defence from the powers of darkness.

Elves and druids, who knew all the malevolent creatures of the forest, joined together in a great ritual where they summoned for the greatest of monsters. The master pyra appeared and introduced himself as Dugankis. Dugankis gave the inhabitants of Cruinne unnatural powers on the condition that one of the creatures of the night they had created would offer its soul completely to evil, and they agreed. Thus the monsters gained more power in their battle against the gods.

And so the small island of Cruinne defeated the great army of Nathos, but at the same time some of Cruinne's inhabitants became fierce warriors who only thought about one thing: all beautiful must die!

The defeat of Nathos led into a civil war that lasted for decades. As a consequence of the war, the Empire split into many smaller parts, largest of which being Nathar that was situated opposite Cruinne, and Dantos to the southeast of it. In the years to come, there would be some squabble between Dantos and Nathar, but nowadays their relations are mostly peaceful. As a result of the squabbles, however, Dantos conquered yet more land from Nathar, which is why the province of Ghedos is split even today.

The days of the great kings and emperors are gone. The Empire of Nathos has fallen apart, but a part of it still dreams of the glory days and hopes one day to rebuild the Empire of Nathos – the Empire of Nathar.

Recent history

Sixteen years ago: Emperor Zangavius seizes power in Nathar toppling King Aldrion VI Sergius. The coup divides the nobility of Nathar in two, others defending the old monarchy and others wanting to raise the glory of Nathar under the leadership of a new emperor. After the coup, the nobles defending the king are executed or thrown in the dungeons. The ones who fled are still considered traitors and persecuted.

Fifteen years ago: King Fetanus II of Dantos dies in dubious circumstances and his nephew Sargus III ascends the throne.

Fourteen years ago: Zangavius raises the quotas of soldiers; in many regions, every young man is obliged to join the army of Nathar for a year after reaching maturity.

Thirteen years ago: Taxes are increased. People are mostly dissatisfied. The length of the statutory military service is extended from one to three years.

Twelve years ago: A Trodai warrior called Aranius, the presumed leader of the rebellious movement, who had managed to infiltrate into the court of Zangavius, is caught and thrown in the dungeon. The King Celyn XIV of Cruinne dies, and his son Celyn XV is crowned.

Eleven years ago: Townspeople are granted privileges at the expense of peasantry.

Ten years ago: The reparations of the decayed road network of Nathar start, especially the reparations of the main roads. People start to think that finally the tax money is spent for something useful.

Nine years ago: Emperor Zangavius apprentices a wizard called Sarnacht. Zangavius founds the Healers' Guild. The members of the guild are hired to circle in towns and look after the sick and old.

Eight years ago: The King Celyn XV of Cruinne marries a noblewoman called Isandra.

Seven years ago: Noblemen, wizards, priests and the officers of the imperial army are exempt from taxes.

Six years ago: The length of military service is extended from three to five years.

Five years ago: A rumour starts going round that the heir of the royal house of Nathar is alive somewhere. The taxes of the farmers and workers living in the countryside are increased.

Four years ago: Townspeople are granted considerable privileges at the expense of peasantry.

Three years ago: Dyanionist priests proclaim Emperor Zangavius a god.

Two years ago: Silent ones declare a war against Dantos and attack immediately. Fortresses are built to the eastern border of Nathar, and imperial troops are moved in large numbers to the south-eastern border to defend Nathar against a possible attack.

Last year: Large part of Dantos is conquered by silent ones. Nathar declares the Dantosian province of South Ghedos Nathar's grand duchy and starts to protect it with military force. Malthos, the western province of Dantos forms a defence alliance with Miran.

This year: Silent ones conquer Dantos. After conquering the provinces of Shados and Tanthar, they are halted in the border of Nathar. The attacks of Natharian soldiers are repelled with terrible force, but the advance of silent ones is halted. The great losses suffered in the border lead to even more intensified recruiting in Nathar.

RELIGION

The world of the Natharians is full of spirits and magic, in the same way as it is full of animals and orcs. People have learned to get along with them, because otherwise there will be troubles.

Gods exist in concrete form, even though they mainly appear to people in forces of nature and inexplicable events. In the Eternal Glaciers situated on the northern side of the Badlands, it is known that gods still – even today – sometimes fight against pyras. When gods are not at war, they live in the Mountain of Gods in the middle of Nathar.

On certain feasts, or if it comes to the pinch, people make a small sacrifice or perform a ritual to keep gods favourable. People rarely dare to ask any favours from gods, since they are often short-tempered and do not like arrogant people. Still gods are neither cruel nor implacable, but they consider as their main duty to take care of the balance of nature. The state of Nathar favours a certain Dyanionist theology and considers other religions heathens, but still there are no religious persecutions.

The Dyanionists believe that people are subjects to gods in the same way as the peasantry is to the nobility. People should be humble and live their lives being obedient to gods and their earthly messengers, the priests. One should not demand anything from gods or nature spirits, but they might reward their faithful servants when they are in a good mood.

In principle, the gods of Nathar (sadir) are worshipped in all the regions of the former Empire of Nathos, but most faithfully they are worshipped in Nathar and Dantos. These true gods are also known in Gethar, but in addition to them, people worship a great number of minor nature spirits as gods. In Cruienne, people worship five gods, for example, gods of death, evil and war, and these gods are not the same as the Natharian gods. There are also temples here and there where Riunas, the Cruinnean god of evil is worshipped and where evil priests make human sacrifices and other horrendous things.

In Eksos, the prevailing way of thinking is Transitionism which forbids the worship of gods and the use of magic. The Miranians are mostly Dyanionists, but magic is often considered more important than gods.

Here and there in southeast Nathar, one may see travelling mystics, known as Neukaists, who believe that men are equal to gods. Neukaism is also called the path of a thousand masks. Neukaists are often accused of stirring up a rebellion, and Dyanionist priests do not like them at all.

Spirits of the world

The world is full of spirits: there is a spirit in every living creature, in plants, stones, and some believe that even the spirits of the dead stay and live in their old homes or near the place they died. There are spirits everywhere. Most spirits are small and insignificant, and one does not need to care about them. The stronger a spirit gets, the more it has power on worldly matters.

The small spirits may drop things, disturb animals, cause illnesses or kill plants. They usually live in holy groves or courtyards, and people try to keep the spirits of their home region favourable by sacrificing them, for example, a bowl of cream in the evening or a gallon of finest oats from every crop. However, in most cases the small spirits live in an old tree or a special animal.

The larger spirits might be forest spirits or guardian angels, and they are often called shadowesses, flamings and momentesses. They have often names of their own; people sacrifice them and ask them favours when stepping into their neighbourhood. They often command the smaller spirits of the

surrounding area, and some of them try to increase their powers, so that they could become gods one day.

The gods are the most powerful of the spirits. They are usually spirits of a particular field of life and they often command a whole army of smaller spirits. It is said that the gods live in the Mountain of Gods, even though many of them are also gods of a large region or an empire.

The influence of the gods as well as other spirits varies from one place to another, and people in the north or in the south do not necessarily worship the same gods. Moreover, a spirit that might be known somewhere as a minor ghost, might be known elsewhere as a powerful god. However, the secrets of the spirit world have not fully opened to the mortals.

Gods

Makhios the Grey is the supreme god and the lord of all gods. It is Makhios who created the world. He can be seen in the sky as a storm or as thunder. Sometimes Makhios visits the people on earth appearing in different forms. In his true divine form he looks like a tall old man with grey curly beard who is dressed in heavy grey robe. He sometimes has an oak staff in his hand. The typical worldly forms for Makhios are a big bull, a horse, an eagle and a griffin. Makhios is usually behind all great miracles and disasters, so it is wise to aim to please him. Many also think that Makhios the Grey is the god of justice.

Venita is Makhios's wife, and she is the goddess of home, love and farming. Venita is a beautiful, curvaceous woman with long hair as golden as a field of corn. She is the goddess of families, mothers and children, and usually, there is a small altar dedicated to her by every fireside. Venita is the most worshipped god in towns and villages. The couples ask Venita to bless their marriage by placing a shell or an ear of corn under the bridal bed.

Solonus the Wanderer, the son of Venita and Makhios, is the Natharian god of the sun and time, who was worshipped with enthusiasm in the old times, but the development of astronomy has diminished his influence especially in towns. However, every winter people sacrifice to him when the night is longest and it is not certain whether the sun will rise again in the morning... When Solonus meets other gods (i.e. in the night and during solar eclipses), he looks like a man with golden hair and red eyes. Every winter Solonus is born again: by spring he is a young man and by autumn he is already an old man. Therefore, people also consider him the god of time and ask him sometimes to tell fortunes. Though Solonus is not married with the goddess Estia, they fall in love every summer, and Estia deceives her husband Safanus by making love with Solonus. Estia and Solonus have children, fire spirits called flamings, who sometimes act as the gods' observers on earth.

Golos is the god of death and the Moon. From time to time he is sad and anguished, and from time to time he is radiant and decadent, always living to the fullest. Golos is Solonus's brother, and together with Solonus they incessantly look after the mortal world watching as the time goes by. Whenever somebody dies, Golos is there to take the dead to the Moon where all the dead live. Golos and Solonus never meet, but they work well together. Golos rules the empire of the dead, which can be seen as the Moon in the night sky, but which is under the world of the mortals in the daytime. Golos also decides whether the souls of the dead may enter the Halls of Praise or whether they are condemned to the Halls of Oblivion. Most of the time, Golos celebrates with the dead in the Halls of Praise or supervises that

the atmosphere is gloomy enough in the Halls of Oblivion. He is said to be as pale as the light side of the Moon and to be dressed in clothes as black as the dark side of the Moon.

Jan Mathus and Estia are siblings and children of Golos and Minerva, the goddess of art. Jan Mathus lives in seas and lakes and he does not interfere in other gods' matters. He is the god of sea, water, fishing and navigation. Some consider him also the god of weather, but according to the general opinion, the god responsible for weather is Makhios. Jan Mathus looks like a man rotten in water, who is dressed in alga, and holds a fish spear or a fishing net in his hand.

Dugankis is the father of monsters. Even though he is a pyra, some believe him to be the god of deception, criminals and monsters. Only few worship Dugankis, but people curse and threaten often in his name. Dugankis leads monsters, pyras and other creatures of evil in the fight against gods. It is said that Dugankis has skin as red as blood and cloven hoofs and buckhorns. There are many stories told about this god of lies, and it is usually impossible to come to an agreement on whether Dugankis is originally Makhios's bastard, a man grown by monsters and adopted by gods or a ruler raised from among pyras. The only thing certain is that he has lived among gods from the beginning of times, even though everybody knows that in the outbreak of war he turns against others.

Geros or Deerman is the lord of forests, animals and hunting. He is a hairy man who spends much of his time with animals in the forests. Some see antlers growing from Geros's head; others say that he often moves in the form of a deer in the forests.

Ersius Prosperus is the god of war, and he leads the continuing fight of gods against pyras, monsters and other enemies of gods. It is told that Ersius was before a mortal man who decided to reach for divinity. Gods set various heroic deeds before him, wars to win and other tasks, until they finally admitted that Ersius was equal to them, and accepted him as god. Maybe it was then that Safanus renounced his duties as the god of war and passed them to Ersius. Ersius Prosperus is armed with the sword Ladinor forged by Waldior.

The god of blacksmiths and metals is Waldior Iron Soul, the legendary blacksmith and wizard. Waldior was originally half human and half elf, but he followed the footsteps of Ersius Prosperus and became a god. Some say that Waldior is mad, but the weapons forged by him are the finest ever seen in Valenor.

Estia of Flames is the goddess of fire, and she is seen as a middle-aged, dark-skinned woman with red hair that consists of hair and fire. Estia of Flames is the wife of Safanus and the mistress of Solonus and also the mother of flamings.

Kuros is the messenger of gods and the god of trade, travellers and thieves. He wanders tirelessly from the Mountain of Gods to the lands of the mortals and back, taking the message of gods to the ordinary people. Kuros is seen as a young man with eagle's wings in his back. It is said that he was conceived when a large white eagless flew directly to the sun, and there the eagless changed into a beautiful woman and mated with Solonus.

Aurora the Wise is Kuros's wife and the protector of sciences and handicrafts. She is the goddess of craftsmen and scholars. Even though wizards do not care much about the gods, they turn to Aurora when they do need favours from above. Aurora is a young woman with big, beautiful eyes and silver hair. Sometimes she also appears as an owl.

Safanus the Scarface is Estia's husband and the former god of blacksmiths and war. Nowadays Ersius Prosperus and Waldior Iron Soul have replaced Safanus, who has become a bitter hermit. Some old warriors might still pray Safanus too for support to their weapons or battles.

Other gods worth mentioning are Lenos, the god of innocent love, Minerva, the goddess of poets, troubadours and artists, as well as Fabius, the god of wine and feasts.

A little while ago Dyanionist priests proclaimed unanimously that they were told that also Emperor Zangavius has lately been raised to divinity. It is told that Makhios himself ordered Zangavius to rule Nathar, and now when he has succeeded gloriously, Makhios has rewarded him by raising him to divinity. One should pray to Emperor Zangavius for success in governing and war and also for Nathar. Furthermore, Zangavius acts as the Makhios's personal messenger, so that Nathar is actually ruled by the emperor of gods himself. So far, the masses do not worship Zangavius in the same way as other gods even though priests diligently urge them to do so.

Spirit creatures

The world is full of spirits who can be seen from time to time. The best-known spirits are the messengers of gods or flamings, flying momentesses, grey folk who mourn the dead and shadowesses who appear in different forces of nature.

Flamings are bastards of Estia, the goddess of fire, and Solonus, the god of the sun, who are born every hot summer. They act as the messengers of gods on earth and observe the life of the mortals. Sometimes when gods do not have the time to show up themselves, they take part in earthly actions through flamings. The flamings are red, flaming creatures who are said to move like flames of fire.

Shadowesses are all women. It seems that they often influence mortals' lives, and people turn to them when they are in need. In different parts of Nathar the shadowesses are known as dreamesses, dancers, forestesses, brides of heaven, daughters of water or enchantresses, and it is said that all these creatures have different kinds of powers or powers of a certain field. The shadowesses grant favours with pleasure, but they always require payment, for example, a couple's first born child. The shadowesses are ghosts without bodies who usually live inside trees, springs, stones or buildings. Often their dwellings are considered sacred. In the moonlight they go out to dance as beautiful, partially transparent women. It is said that they are roguish and impatient by nature.

Momentesses are nature spirits, dedicated strictly to one thing, who fly with their bat wings above forests howling terribly.

Grey women and grey men are nature spirits once fallen in love with a mortal, whose spouses have died a long time ago. They have never gotten over their grief, and they moan with heavy hearts near the place where their beloved ones died.

Chronology

The chronology of Nathar begins with the year when the first great king of the Empire of Nathos, Valius the Unifier, returned to Gaidava after years and years of military expedition, of which result was the birth of the Empire of Nathos. Valianic calendar divides the time in twelve units according to the old way of calculation, even though all Nathar has switched to the decimal system.

There are twelve periods in one circle, there are twelve years in one period there are twelve months and in one year. Usually when talking about dates, one mentions only the period and the years – just like we usually leave out the century. According to Valianic calendar, the third year of the sixth period of the seventh circle is beginning, or the 927th year after the return of Valius the Unifier. Some might know that VII.6.III is the year 316 of Cruinnean time.

The year is divided in four seasons: winter, spring, summer and autumn. The year begins on the darkest day of winter known as the winter solstice. There are 372 days in a year which are divided in twelve months each lasting 31 days. The months are called Pour month, Frost month, Thaw month, Burn-beating month, Bud month, Forest month, Corn month, Crop month, Wind month, Auburn month, Cadaverous month and Winter month.

One season lasts for three months, and the year changes in the middle of winter. Therefore, Winter month, Pour month and Frost month are the winter months. Thaw month starts spring, Forest month starts summer and Wind month starts autumn. The first month (Pour month) lasts from December 21st to January 20th in Earth calendar.

The winter and summer solstices as well as the harvest festival are public holidays. The winter solstice, taking place in midwinter and beginning a new year, is considered the day when the light triumphs the dark. However, the night before is greatly feared, because it is never certain whether the sun will rise in the morning. In the night people often sacrifice to Solonus, the god of the sun, so that the sun would rise again over Nathar. If the sun rises, people celebrate by giving presents to family and friends.

The spring equinox is Venita's Day and the celebration of beauty and youth. Traditionally, people have great feast in towns and villages on Venita's Day, where conjurers and entertainers show their talents and where people sacrifice to gods in hope of a good season.

The summer solstice or the first day of Crop month is also Makhios's Day. Then people have great feasts all over Nathar, and they have fun and eat and most of all, they drink ale and swim a lot. It is said that drinking ale goes straight to Makhios's stocks for the rains of the following year. When playing in the water, it is customary to splash water on others and say: "May it rain like this!"

On the first day of Wind month is the Harvest Day, but the feast begins already on the last day of Crop month, on the eve of the Harvest Day. On both days, people celebrate the end of the harvest by dancing, singing, eating and drinking. People thank gods for good crops, especially Venita.

The autumn equinox, the first day of Auburn month, is considered the day of darkness and evil when monsters and evil spirits are on the move. From that day the evenings get even darker and the monsters will not fall back where they came from until on the winter solstice when the light triumphs the darkness again. On the autumn equinox people make large bonfires and offer gods food and drink, because during this time gods are fighting against monsters.

NATIONS AND REGIONS

Various cultures and creatures meet in Valenor, sometimes in order to trade or negotiate in peaceful terms, sometimes to fight against each others in bloody battles. Mostly the nations on the continent of Almon try to live separately, but the clash of cultures is not always avoidable.

Species

Men are the most common species living in the southwest of Almon, but not the only one. Even though men are divided into many nationalities, there are creatures living in the remote corners of Nathar and especially outside the borders of the former Empire of which no-one has heard anything but stories in civilized lands. Here are the most common species and races that one might meet when wandering in Nathar.

MEN are hairy, simple and in every other way like modern people. It is supposed later in the text that the reader is used to seeing men, so that men are considered here as a kind of basic race to which others are compared. They also breed like rabbits, so they are almost everywhere. Men live to be about sixty years old – however, their teeth start to fall off already at the age of thirty.

ORCS are fierce, grey-skinned warriors and hunters. Just like children of many other monsters, they also live in terms of the nature. Orcs are very territorial by nature and they defend their home rocks to the last breath. At best, orcs live to be forty years of age, unless diseases, parasites or adventurers kill them before that. Orcs are also known as stonesouls, cannibals and a nation of beasts. In Nathar, orcs live in the wilderness and sometimes also near settlements of men where they tend pigs and help men of the region in tracking. Killing an orc is not punished unless it is owned by a man.

GHISTS remind orcs great deal, but it is said that their souls are utterly rotten and that they only thirst for everlasting night on earth. As one might guess, ghists live mainly in Cruinne, and that's why some call them the orcs of Cruinne. Like orcs, ghists live to be about forty years old.

SILENT ONES are a cruel and evil species living in the region to the southeast of Nathar. Their general appearance reminds somehow a dragon or a bird the size of a man. There are a lot of contradictory stories about silent ones, but it is generally believed that they possess some kind of magic powers. Mostly they keep to themselves in their towns and mysterious palaces hidden from the eye of man, but lately there have been rumours that the silent ones would have declared war against mankind and conquered the state of Dantos. Silent ones have remained some kind of mystery to men, but it is believed that they live to be hundreds of years old. One might also hear silent ones called sallow beasts, mute murderers, white death or lizard men.

ELVES are soulless creatures of dark with meagre face and pointed, almost hornlike ears. There is some kind of ethereal look on elves' faces, which is said to be caused by their connection to the pyras of the Abyss. Sometimes it is said that elves are children of evil spirits living on earth, sometimes that they are immortal because of the agreement made with Dugankis. When moving among men, they are beware of as thieves and saboteurs. Sometimes elves are also called darkminds, cradle robbers or stick ears. The elves obey their horrible king Areddliss the Cruel.

PYRAS are red-skinned monsters who live in the Abyss underneath the earth's crust. Most pyras have the same shape as men, but their appearances vary from malformed animals to giants with wings. Horns, red wings, cloven hoofs, tail, long claws and red hair are all common characteristics of a pyra. Usually pyras walk among men only in bad intensions: hunting innocent souls or trying to conquer Nathar. Many pyras try to steal human or animal body parts and join them to their own bodies – that is how pyras grow in strength. The priests can protect men from pyras and some wizards can command them. Pyras are also called devils, demons and hornheads. The leader of the pyras is the evil god Dugankis.

There are all kinds of stories told of such fairy-tale creatures as brownies living in the primeval forests of Cruinne, treacherous gnomes hiding in gloomy caves, weak-willed dwarfs enslaved by wizards, goblins stealing human children, fairies of enchanted groves, giants who ruled Valenor in the beginning of times, satyrs with cloven hoofs and buckhorns as well as many other strange creatures, but one should not believe them all. However, peculiar things happen in this world of magic and mysteries...

Countries of men

CRUINNE is an island state in the middle of the Weeping Sea where men, elves and wood demons live together. Cruinne is the main reason for the fall of the Empire of Nathos, and the men of Cruinne are usually considered a bit strange and untrustworthy. Cruinne is ruled by Warrior-King Celyn XV ip Celyn a Duich. The symbol of Cruinne is a red dragon on a white background.

DANTOS is after Nathar the greatest of the countries of men in Almon. It is situated to the southeast of Nathar and it continues to the east indefinitely. However, conquered by silent ones, Dantos is no longer a proud and honourable nation like Nathar, but has fallen into a total decay. The great towns have been forgotten and left in their own abundance, and the people there have lived pernicious and dissolute lives for generations. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer as the nobility exploits the peasantry with the lead of Priest-King Sargus III. Dantosian architecture and wine are also famous in Nathar, and as one explains the fact that the nation is in as good state as it is, other explains why it has fallen into such decay. To protect itself from the invasion of the silent ones, Malthos, the western province of Dantos has formed a defence alliance with Miran. Nathar, on the other hand, has taken the northern parts of Dantos under its protection forming the grand duchy of South Ghedos. Free Dantos was ruled by Priest-King Sargus III Palthuïn. The symbol of Dantos is a black bull on a grey background.

EKSOS is situated by the shores of the Weeping Sea to the south of Nathar. The land in Eksos is fertile, and the life is easy in every way. The fields and orchards are luxuriant, and the small forests here and there have plenty of game. There are philosophers, artists and scientists living in many towns of Eksos who spend their time deliberating about the nature of the world. Therefore, the dominant way of thinking is Transitionism, which emphasises man's own abilities without the influence of gods or

magic. Eksosians are also well-known navigators and explorers, and Eksosian ships are a familiar sight in the ports of Nathar. Unlike the other countries of men, Eksos is not a kingdom but a democracy. The matters of a town or a village are decided in outdoor meetings, and the matters concerning the whole state are decided in the senate, which is an elected council with twenty members. Nowadays, the senate is led by Chairman Ketiros. The symbol of Eksos is a golden goat on a purple background.

GETHAR is a poor but tough kingdom situated to the north of Nathar. Since Gethar is an austere region and farming is not worthwhile, there are no big towns there and the population is scattered. In Gethar one must be prepared to defend oneself if necessary because of the barbarians of the north, and thus Getharians are known as fierce fighters. Gethar is ruled by King Leivius I Kassandros. The symbol of Gethar is a red wolf on a green background.

MIRAN is a small kingdom between two great countries that has managed to stay independent with the help of a large number of wizards in its population. Most Miranians possess some sort of mystic skills, and the Highest Tower has students more from Miran than any other country, even though the population of Miran is fairly small. The villages of Miran are full of dreamers, wizards and exorcists, but still most of the people are farmers and craftsmen who use their random magical skills to make everyday chores easier. Queen Marudia Davorina of Miran is, as far as is known, also a powerful wizard, even though she has not studied in the Highest Tower. The symbol of Miran is a silver unicorn on a green background.

NATHAR is all what is left of the glory of the Empire of Nathos. Nathar is now trying again to reach greatness with the lead of Emperor Zangavius, but this has made some citizens very dissatisfied. However, the vigorous rebuilding and the restoration of the glory have begun. There are some great towns in Nathar, but the settlements are mostly concentrated in the villages and manors. The typical sources of livelihood in Nathar are farming, hunting, fishing, and craftsmanship. The symbol of the empire of Nathar is a wings spreading golden eagle on a blue background. The symbol of the kingdom is a roaring golden lion on a red background. The last king of Nathar was Aldrion VI Sergius, but he and all his descendants are dead.

Coalitions of men

The Eagle knights form the personal guard of the emperor, and their main duty is to protect the emperor. It is said that the Eagle knights also act as some sort of secret police watching officials, officers and priests. Sometimes “the Eagles” also travel around Nathar taking care of different types of important duties, which may also include acting as legislators, judges and executioners. That is why the soldiers dressed in black tabards with silver patterns are feared everywhere in Nathar. Many of the knights are foreigners, because they have no ties to the domestic policy of Nathar.

The Trodai warriors form a secret society of warriors of which not much is known. As far as is known, the warrior fraternity was founded to protect the emperor in the times of the Empire of Nathos, but after Zangavius seized power, most of the Trodai have become rebels or outlaws.

Wizards are feared eccentrics who know the secrets of magic better than anyone else. The wizards are trained in the Highest Tower in the Dark Forest where more experienced wizards teach younger ones. The wizards leave the Highest Tower for few years when they become apprentices of wizards living

outside the Dark Forest. Gloomy stories are told of what happens inside the walls of the Highest Tower, since ordinary people rarely understand wizards or find them pleasant.

The clergy has an important position mainly in the large towns of Nathar. Even though the people prefer the presence of a priest in weddings, funerals and naming ceremonies, the normal peasants do not go to temples except on holy days. Therefore, the priests in the countryside may travel from one village to another as needed. In the towns, there is often a temple for the supreme god of the region as well as a temple for all gods, and in all of them there are priests to perform daily ceremonies. The people do not dare to defy priests, because they are under the protection of gods – it is said that some priests may even use the power of the god they serve through their own bodies.

The Order of the Iron Moon is the order of female mercenaries that is mainly active in South Nathar. The sisters of the Iron Moon are known as strong warriors who consider never retrieving in a battle their point of honour. They tattoo themselves as a proof of their feats of valour. When a woman joins the order, it is for the rest of her life, and she is not permitted to marry a man.

The Followers of Riunas worship the Cruinnean god of diseases and pain. Their secret temples can be found in many towns, and the followers allure unsuspecting people into the temples and sacrifice them in their rituals.

Wizard inspectors are wizards wandering around the world, who search for illegal magicians and punish them. Wizard inspectors are feared, and rare are those who dare to defy them. Wizard inspectors wander alone and they are typically dressed in purple robes and broad brimmed hats. In most large towns governed by dukes, there is often a wizard inspector wandering in the region.

The Children of Geros are hermits who spend most their lives in the forests of Nathar serving Geros and looking after the forests. In some parts they are hired as gamekeepers, and in some parts they are feared as outlaws. The Children of Geros are often dressed in green and brown clothes, and they are armed with bows and axes or spears. Most of them have close relations with forest spirits.

The pirates are usually thieves parted from the crews of trading or warships originally from Gethar or the shores of the Sea of Shadows. They are commonly seen especially on the shores of the Weeping Sea. Gethar, Cruinne and the northern parts of Nathar suffer most from the pirates.

Witches live in lonely hovels here and there in the country and in the forests where they practise cursing, healing, preparing magic potions and other forms of magic. Witches are not always trusted, but it is known that evil creatures do not dare to approach them. It is also considered a good thing that they teach magic to women and others who cannot be accepted to the Highest Tower. On the other hand, anyone having something to do with witches, breaks the law of magic and the wizard inspectors wandering in the region might even punish them with death.

The knights of Cruinne is an order of knights fallen into decay which maintains some kind of order in Cruinne. Their commander is one of the five lords of Cruinne and directly below the king. They are also seen occasionally in Nathar where people treat them with reservation, even though some of them act honourably.

Towns and other constructions of men

ADOR is the biggest town in the province of Vakar. It is situated where the Deep Strait joins the Sea of Shadows, and it is a popular place of trade, even though it must often be defended with the forces of armies against the attacks of barbarians and monsters.

BAROSTAN is a Dantosian town and the capital of the province of Tanthar. In many ways Barostan is closer to Nathar than its homeland. It trades frequently with Natharian towns Sarkos and Margova, and there have been even attempted coups occasionally in Barostan with the purpose of annexing Tanthar to Nathar.

DALOR is an ancient town destroyed before the days of Valius the Unifier. There are many tales and songs about the abundance and beauty of Dalor, but the stories of anyone visiting the town and returning alive are rarely heard, since Dalor is situated in the middle of the Cursewoods.

DENEVA is the capital of the province of Vakar with a port from where the ships sail to especially Gethar and Cruinne. However, it is constantly threatened by pirates, and the life there, as in all Vakar, is insecure.

DUICH is the capital of Cruinne. It is a fairly small trade town on the east coast of Cruinne, and the King of Cruinne and his knights live there.

ERKOR is a small trade town along the Trade Route in the province of Thelar. It is governed by wizards and it does not pay taxes to Nathar – on the other hand, it does not need the protection of the army either.

GAIDAVA is the capital of Nathar. In addition to the imperial palace, the only university of Nathar is in Gaidava.

GARBURG is the centre of the Dantosian scholarship. Most Dantosian aristocrats study in the gymnasium of Garburg, which often enjoys guest lecturers from Eksos or Gaidava. Garburg is also a place of trade. The priests are not as respected there as in other parts of Dantos.

GRISHAF is a small coastal town on the shores of the Sea of Shadows. It is one of the important places where the pioneers from eastern forests, orcs and elves trade with Nathar. Grishaf is situated in the grand duchy of Lagar.

GUTHMARK is the capital of the Dantosian Ghedos. There are many magnificent stone buildings and statues in Guthmark as a proof of the power of Dantos. Most of the trade between Dantos and Nathar goes through Guthmark.

GURNOVA, which is situated in the grand duchy of Lagar, is a town mostly inhabited by Natharians. It was originally a village of the silver and iron mines' workers in the Gore Mountains, but it grew fast into a flourishing trade town and free port.

HENDAR is more like a big village than a small town, but nevertheless, it is the capital of Gethar. The port of Hendar is a safe haven for ships sailing between the Sea of Shadows and the Sea of Cruinne.

The HIGHEST TOWER is the wizards' mysterious seat of learning. There are many frightening stories told about the Highest Tower, and that is why most people are happy that it is situated in the middle of the Dark Forest.

JONOVA is a silent Dantosian town. The people of Jonova are said to be quiet and humble, but incredibly stingy. Most of the Jonovans leaving their hometown are merchants, but the town lives mostly on farming and raising cattle.

KADOS is a Dantosian trade town on the shores of the Sea of Shadows.

LAGOVA is a trade town on the south-eastern shore of the Sea of Shadows through which Nathar does most of its trade with the east. One can see there people from every nation of men as well as orcs, elves and in the old times, also silent ones, all trading there. Lagova is the capital of the grand duchy of Lagar.

MARGOVA is the capital of the province of Ghedos. It is an important religious centre, because it is situated at the foot of the Mountain of Gods.

MILOS is a gloomy but beautiful town in Dantos. The administration in Milos is severe and the people live beneath the continuous yoke of the clergy. This is why the innumerable temples are the most beautiful and even beggars are dressed neatly.

NATHOVA is a busy trade town along the Trade Route in the province of Thelar. It is said that Nathova was the capital of the Empire of Nathos in the old times before Valius the Unifier moved it to Gaidava.

OLANOS is the most western town of Dantos and the capital of the province of Malthos. Olanos has close relations to Miran and that is why the priests often have to do their best, sometimes fighting against the influence of wizards and sometimes welcoming the local magicians to their congregation.

PALDOVA is the capital of the kingdom of Dantos and the province of Shados, and it is situated in the crossroads of many busy trade routes. It is also a true town of temples, because there is a temple for every Dantosian god and even for many foreign gods in Paldova. Moreover, there is an enormous palace temple in the centre of Paldova from where Priest-King Sargus III rules.

PODOVA is the capital of Eksos and the place where the senate assembles. It is also a rich trade town, since all the best products of farmers and craftsmen always find their way there from every corner of the country.

SANGORN is situated along the Blood River near the border between Eksos and Miran. It is the most southern town of Nathar and the visitors from the south are not a rare sight there. The marketplace of Sangorn and its pubs are well known among philosophers, travellers, priests, scholars, and wizards as meeting places where one might hear most amazing stories and profound conversations.

SARKOS is a town of trade and temples, situated by the Lake of the Holy and at the mouth of the Golden River.

SEREVA is situated at the fork of the Surge River and the Bird River. In the north, a short distance away from Sereva, there is a large broadleaf forest, and in the east, there is a large coniferous forest, so Sereva is known as a good place for trading game and furs.

SLONEVA is the most northern town of Eksos. It trades frequently with Gaidava and Duich by sea. It is said that everyone who lives in Sloneva is a philosopher.

THEGARD is the food supply of Dantos producing great amounts of wine, corn, meat and cheeses. The nobility and the aristocracy live rich and abundant lives there, and that is why many foreigners like to spend their holidays there. However, the peasants of the region rebel often.

TOLOVA is the capital of the province of Thelar and its great port is also the base of the Nathar navy.

The TRADE ROUTE is a route that starts from Gaidava, goes through Erkor and Nathova and ends in Ador. Sometimes the route from Ador to Gurnova by sea is also considered a part of the Trade Route. In past few years the emperor has eased the lives of the traders travelling along the Trade Route by straightening the route and paving it with stones and also by ordering patrols at regular intervals along the route. At the same time, the road customs have risen.

TSELOVA is the most southern town of Eksos and some sort of centre of navigation. It is surrounded by a great archipelago full of fishermen and farmers who also get into fights with each other.

VLANOVA is the only Eksosian town on the east coast. It is situated on the shores of the Bay of Eksos and it trades at least with the Miranians. Some say that there are wizards living in the town as well as orcs, and all kinds of scary stories are told about it.

Geographical places

The ADOR STRAIT is the thin strip of water on the northern side of Ador that separates the Wolf Sea from the Sea of Shadows.

ALMON is the continent where the ancient Empire of Nathos was situated. It begins in the west from the shores of the Weeping Sea and it continues in the east to the Silent Lands and further on. In the north, Almon reaches at least the Great Glaciers, and in the south the Plains of Dreams, but no-one has tried to find out what is after them.

The BADLANDS are situated in the north and they are full of barbarians. The shores of the Badlands are ragged and there are fishermen's villages and ports of pirate ships feared in every corner of the Weeping Sea scattered along the coast. The inland is mostly full of gloomy woods and cold steppes which make people gloomy, morose and violent. Even in the times of the Empire of Nathos, the barbarians of the Badlands used to amuse themselves by attacking southern villages and towns, and to be honest, they have not improved their manners ever since.

The BAY OF EKSOS is the sea area that opens from the Weeping Sea and separates Eksos from the Haunted Mountains. There are many trading ships sailing in the bay carrying valuable goods between Miran and Eksos. It is said that sometimes the orc ships sail there too – as well as the pirate ships.

The BIRD RIVER runs from southeast to northwest in Dantos and Nathar, and finally joins the Surge River on the west side of Sereva. It forms the border between many fiefs in the province of Ghedos.

The BLOOD RIVER is the river that follows the south border of Nathar and separates Nathar from Eksos, Miran and Dantos. It has gotten its name from the numerous battles taken place on its shores.

The CURSEWOODS are a large, almost deserted forest between Gaidava and the Mountain of Gods. It holds inside an almost lifeless forest with standing and barkless dead trees and quagmire with bogholes in so irregular distances that no living creature wishes to stay there for longer than is absolutely necessary. There is not much game there either. Only the infertility of the soil and the rumours of the spirits and pyras protecting the forest – for some reason they use the forest as a battle field – prevent people from burning it to create farmland.

The DARK FOREST is an immense, gloomy forest where even the bravest adventurers should not go in the night time. It is known that the Dark Forest is cursed and full of monsters and other creatures of darkness. In the middle of the forest is the Highest Tower where the wizards learn their skills. As far as is known, the wizards protect their own in the forest, but they multiply the horrors of the forest to those who come there in bad intentions. The Dark Forest is situated in the north-eastern Nathar, even though the people there do not respect any governments or laws. It partly protects Nathar from silent ones and from Dantos, but at the same time it keeps many excellent ports by the Sea of Shadows from the reach of Nathar.

The DEEP STRAIT between Gethar and Nathar separates the Sea of Cruinne from the Wolf Sea. It is a shipping channel with frequent traffic.

FURWOOD is situated in the North Nathar by the Trade Route, and it is full of elks, bears and other animals with beautiful furs. Both Ador and Nathova are equally far away from it, but in different directions, and the merchants of both towns make good profit with the treasures of Furwood.

The GOLDEN RIVER flows from the Lake of the Holy to the Sea of Shadows. The Dark Forest remains on its northern side and Dantos on its southern side. Many trade ships sail along it, but it has not gotten its name from any of them. It was named after the opportunists washing gold from the river. The Dantosian town of Kados is situated in the place where the Golden River joins the Sea of Shadows.

The GORE MOUNTAINS begin from the northern shore of the Sea of Shadows and continue to the horizon in the northeast. There are some iron and gold mines in the mountains, but they have not been very productive because of the continuous threat posed by barbarians and monsters.

The GREAT GLACIERS are the areas on the northern side of the Badlands where the land is constantly covered by snow and the sea by ice. Even though people used to live there in the old times, they do not endure the cold of the glaciers anymore. It is said that the Great Glaciers are the battlefield of gods and monsters, and nothing will ever grow there.

The HAUNTED MOUNTAINS are situated in the south first separating Miran from the Plains of Dreams and then the Plains of Dreams from the Bay of Eksos. It is said that the Haunted Mountains are full of undead, hallucinations and evil spirits, so people of Nathar do not really dare to go there. However, with the help of wizards' magic, the Miranians quarry gold and jewels from the Haunted Mountains.

The LAKE OF THE HOLY is a lake on the southern side of the Mountain of Gods that joins the Surge River and the Golden River together. Therefore, there are lot of places of pilgrimage and places of trade on its shores. On the other hand, it is situated in the shadow of the Dark Forest, so it offers also plenty of opportunities for adventurers to earn their living.

The MOUNTAIN OF GODS is an extremely high mountain in the middle of Nathar on the top of which the gods are said to live. It is known that the mountain carries the vault of heaven and is therefore the centre of the world.

PINE LAKE is a small lake in the middle of Furwood.

PYRA ISLAND is a large island in the Wolf Sea, and its caves are full of pyras. Luckily they cannot cross the sea, but still the ships always circle it sailing close to the southern shore of the Wolf Sea.

The PLAINS OF DREAMS are situated on the southern side of Miran and Dantos. The Plains of Dreams are endless plains and deserts where unreal powers are said to measure powers against each other. In the northern parts of the Plains of Dreams there are people living in small nomadic tribes, but the further south the people have gone, only fewer of them have returned. It is told that the reality and the imagination get mixed in the Plains of Dreams and that the madness takes over even the strongest mind. On the other hand, the stories about the lost towns, promised lands and treasuries of gods on the other side of the plains urge daredevils to try their luck.

The SEA OF CRUINNE is a sea area on the northern side of Cruinne. In the east, the Sea of Cruinne reaches the shores of Nathar, Gethar and the Badlands. In the north it changes into the Eternal Glacier. The Deep Strait between Nathar and Gethar separates the Sea of Cruinne from the Wolf Sea.

The SEA OF SHADOWS is an inland sea on the north-eastern side of Nathar, on which shores situate also the Dark Forest, Dantos, Gethar and the Badlands. Many trade and cargo ships sail on the Sea of Shadows and many trade routes cross it. Here and there on the shores of the Sea of Shadows there are trade places and towns, and on the north shore at the foot of the Gore Mountains there are also few mining villages and towns. Nathar has declared some of these its official colonies.

The SILENT LANDS are on the eastern side of the Sea of Shadows and Dantos. Only few people have been allowed to visit the Silent Lands and it is not known whether the lands are divided in states or in other units. It is known that the silent ones have some towns by the Sea of Shadows.

SMOKEWOOD is situated on the southern side of the Mountain of Gods and it spans nearly the entire province of Ghedos. The area is densely populated, and the forest has gotten its name from the smoke of fires, bonfires and fireplaces that can be seen far away.

The SURGE RIVER is a river much used as a trade route that begins from the Lake of the Holy and ends in the Weeping Sea. Along the river rise the towns of Makhova, Margova and Gaidava. After Sereva the Bird River that flows from Dantos, joins the Surge River. It is possible to sail along the Surge River from the Weeping Sea to the Sea of Shadows.

THAWED LAKE separates Erkor from the Cursewoods. This lake is abounding in fish and provides food for the people of Erkor even in coldest winters, since it is not worth while to hunt in the Cursewoods.

The WEEPING SEA is an ocean situated to the west of Almon. In the middle of the Weeping Sea lies the island kingdom of Cruinne, and by its shores there are Eksos, Nathar, Gethar and the Badlands. In the south the Haunted Mountains separate the Plains of Dreams from the Weeping Sea. No one knows what is on the other side of the Weeping Sea, but the general assumption is the end of the world. In the north the Weeping Sea changes into the Sea of Cruinne.

The WITCH CAPE is a peninsula formed by Gethar and the areas to the north of Gethar.

Common Natharian names

(Based on Proto-Germanic, Old English; some names are influenced by Cruinnean names or names of elves and gods; some names are common versions of the names of the Old Language)

Typically the Natharian common people use only first names. If a person must be separated from another person with the same name, it is done with the name of a parent (Barothan, the son of Kharibert, Bera, the daughter of Bryta), with an epithet (Ramald the Blacksmith, Limping Hilda) or by using the domicile if the person is travelling (Rosamund of Fastric, Lindsein Gerold). If the name is long, the shortened version is often used, for example, Erkenthan could be called either Erken or Than.

Man's names

Woman's names

Names of places

Noble Natharian names

(Latin style)

These names are mainly used by the nobles even though some rich aristocrats occasionally change their names into one of these to sound more refined. The nobles use a first name and at least one surname. Sometimes the surname may be a noble family name (Thanos Arathuin, Diana Arathina), sometimes the name of the region ruled by the family (Silvanus Helmstan, Lusian Helmstan), but both can be used too (Eruvius Bolgios Fastmark, Ghadina Bolgia Fastmark).

Some aristocrats have started to use surnames, but more often the first name of noble style is combined with the common practice of forming names (Hadadius, the son of Hadronius, Elena of Ador).

Man's names

Woman's names

LEGENDS

On dark winter nights Natharians like to tell legends or act them and sing songs. Some of them are meant to make the time go faster, others are meant to teach about history or warn about the dangers of life.

The Sorrowful Wanderer

There is a legend about an elf whose life has been filled with sorrow. It is not known why the elf is so sorrowful – whether for losing the beloved one, whether for killing the best friend accidentally or whether for just getting tired of living. The Sorrowful Wanderer travels in Valenor always appearing here and there in the form of a man or a woman. The elf is known with different names in different places, few of them being the Grey Wanderer, the Wistful One and the Follower of the Shadows.

It is said that when the Sorrowful Wanderer has wandered all the roads of Valenor from the beginning to the end and from the end to the beginning, the Sorrowful Wanderer finally dies.

The woman who changes into an orc

Once upon a time there was a village where an old man and an old woman lived. The old man was quiet and modest, but his wife was a real shrew who yelled at her husband all the time and sometimes even beat him. The other men of the village sometimes felt sorry for the old man, sometimes they laughed at him.

One day the old man had enough and left for a town close by, where a wizard lived. The old man asked for the wizard to give a lesson to the old woman, but the wizard only answered: "Nature will take care of its own." The old man was not satisfied with the answer he got from the wizard, and so he turned to Venita, the goddess of home for help, but the answer she gave was the same than the wizard's. Then he tried to call the spirits living in the village, and finally, even Dugankis, but the answer was always the same. "Nature will take care of its own."

And not for long before the old woman got sick. The old man was pleased hoping that finally he would get rid of the old shrew. Then the old woman started to get grey blotches on her face and her teeth begun to ache. Both found all that very strange and no one in the village knew what could cause that.

A week passed, and then another, but the old woman did not get better. Then one morning the old man woke up beside his wife, and noticed that the old woman had changed into an orc. Her face was all grey, her eyes were small pig eyes, and her mouth had changed in to a muzzle with tusks pushing through. The old woman's character had become even meaner, her blows became even stronger, and naturally, she blamed the old man for what had happened.

So nature had taken care of its own, and the wicked were punished, the old woman as well as the old man who did not know how to speak to his own wife.

Dionos and Aldriona

According to an old legend, in the days of the ancient Empire of Nathos, the oldest son of the emperor, Dionos, abandoned his people and heritage, and fell in love with an elf woman called Aldriona. Aldriona was the daughter of the cruel Elf-King Areldliss. Their love was mad and all destroying.

Aldriona lived in an elf grove surrounded by enormous flames, and every time they met, Dionos had to walk through the wall of fire every night and leave before the dawn. If other elves had seen him, they would have killed him on the spot.

There are different kinds of versions to the legend, but in the one that is best known, Dionos and Aldriona elope, get married and live together in exile. They live happily for a while, but then the mortal Dionos grows old and dies. After that the grief drives Aldriona mad and she kills herself.

In another version the Elf-King Areldliss finds out the affair and kills Aldriona. Then Dionos dies in the flames trying to find his beloved one. According to another version they have children, half elves, who then kill their parents. In more obscene version Aldriona changes into a man or has been a man all along, and just used the form of a woman to seduce Dionos.

Be that as it may, the love of Dionos and Aldriona and the fire wall are generally thought to be the symbol of great love.

Waldior the Blacksmith

In ancient times there was a man called Waldior living in some corner of Nathar, and he was the greatest blacksmith Valenor had ever known. It was him who forged the swords of the ancient kings and the Trodai warriors protecting them.

The most famous sword forged by Waldior was the magic sword Ladinor that Waldior had made for the hero Ersius Prosperus. He also forged Dalbien, the sword of the great king Valius the Unifier. Waldior himself used Othronriol, the spear he had forged for himself.

It is said that the iron lived inside Waldior, and that never before him nor after him had a sword been forged that would win the weapon he had forged. Waldior got his powers from Safanus, the god of blacksmiths.

It is known that Waldior was half human, half elf and that is why the fires of the Abyss burned in his forge. As a half elf, Waldior was a madman, but also a wizard who grew backwards from an old man to a child. He is also known by the names of Waldior Half Elf and Waldior Iron Soul.

Even now one may sometimes still see swords which are said to be forged by Waldior. These claims are heard in the marketplaces as well as in the castles of knights – and some of the claims may even be true.

High stakes

Once wandering in the Dark Forest, the hero Ersius Prosperus was captured by Dugankis. Dugankis was in a hurry and he dragged Ersius he had roped to an enormous black hall of an enormous black castle. In the hall there was an enormous black table and sitting around it were Elf-King Areldliss the Cruel and the feared chief of orcs Shagath Three Fingers.

Dugankis joined Areldliss and Three Fingers and together they started to play dice. On the table there were gold coins and each of them was, as Ersius heard, “worth ten”. The game went on and Areldliss started to win more, which started to make Shagath and Dugankis angry, and soon they attacked the elf. In the tumult of the battle, Ersius managed to cut his ropes. He stole the gold coins and fled from the black castle. And there, when he got out of the castle, each gold coin changed into ten men. They gambled with human lives in the black castle and this is how Ersius saved them.

The Collector and the Swan Song

It is said that in the seas of Valenor flies a white ship called the Swan Song. The ship used to belong to Makhios himself, the lord of air and weather, but an immortal elf, known as the Collector, had bought it from him with a favour.

The Collector sails through the air with the Swan Song collecting items, one finer and rarer than the other. It is said that the Collector owns swords forged by Waldior, magic jewels, the Horn Crown and the original thirteen masks of the gods. He has all the books of Valenor in his library and there are rare animals from griffins to fire dragonflies in his zoo.

No one knows who the Collector is, but some believe that he is a man who has sworn allegiance to Dugankis. Others say that the Collector is an elf like the Sorrowful Wanderer who finds meaning for his life from only one thing. Some claim that the Collector is not just one person, but a strange small sect that always chooses a new Collector when the old one has died. Or perhaps the Collector is only a phantom created by the Swan Song itself. However, it is certain that if one ever tries to find a rare or valuable item, one cannot be too careful when the Collector is concerned.

EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE ARMY

The safety in Nathar is secured by the army. Many of the soldiers are sons of ordinary farmers who are paying their debt to the fatherland in the imperial army. The hearts of the volunteers are guided by their faith in Nathar, the only true fatherland which is now led by an emperor instead of a king. Even though there are also ambitious greedy individuals in the army, the powerful army is the only hope to reach greatness and also guarantee the peace in Nathar.

The major part of the resources of the imperial army goes to internal affairs of the country, hunting for rebels and destroying their bases. Without the rebellion, the taxes would be lower and one would not have to be always afraid of getting hanged as a traitor. Perhaps the statutory military service will be made shorter, at least after the frontier regions will be secured again.

Every fief supplies a certain quota of soldiers for the army every year. In many places this means the recruitment by force for five years of all mature men, in some parts only the poor or the ones with bad luck are recruited. In some places the count has to pay for mercenaries, so that there will be enough men for the army and for the fields. It is also known to have happened that someone is discharged after five years of service and then after a short while, recruited again.

Before the time of the emperor, the army did not exist as such as it exists now, but every village offered couple knights to the service of the king and the peasants were armed when necessary.

Ways of the army

In the army the soldiers have learned to follow orders without asking questions. One can always complain, and grousing is a very common habit in the army. However, it is not worth being insubordinate very often, because the discipline in the army is very strict. Corporal punishments and bullying are common consequences of insubordination.

The deserters get naturally the worst punishment: not only are they hanged as traitors, but they also put their families and friends under suspicion of rebellion. At worst, ten people, who otherwise would have lived, might be hanged for one deserter. That is why deserters are despised both by the army and civilians.

The orcs living in Nathar are, like men, obliged to take part in the military service. They are usually the first ones sent for dangerous quests and only few people want to serve with them. Therefore, there are separate orc regiments with only grey skinned warriors. Sometimes there are orc soldiers in the regiments of men as well.

Usually young men are recruited to army for five years right after they have reached maturity. The first year is spent as recruits training and getting used to the ways of the army. The next four years the soldier usually spends in the rank of a conscript or a front-line soldier, but he might also be promoted as a sergeant. By distinguishing himself in the battle or as a leader, a competent sergeant might also be promoted as a lieutenant.

After five years of service, it is also possible to continue in the army, and then the promotion is usually guaranteed, even though a common man can never be promoted higher than a lieutenant in rank. It is not unheard of that a heroic lieutenant is dubbed a knight. The orc soldiers may never be promoted higher than a front-line soldier.

The soldiers of a higher rank are saluted by standing at attention and saluting with “the hail of the emperor”: one hits the left shoulder with the fist of the right hand and then one raises the arm forward still holding the hand in fist. The movement must be swift and firm. The hail is ended by lowering the arm down to the side.

The officers are treated and spoken to with respect, especially the superior ones. In practice, many lower officers try to stay in close relations with the soldiers, since many of them have started their military service at the same time.

Military ranks

Recruit: A soldier in the infantry or in the navy, recruited less than a year ago. Usually in training or on the guard.

Reservist: A fully served infantryman who can be recruited again. Obligated to stay effective.

Conscript: A soldier who has been in the army for at least a year. Conscripts form a major part of the forces in towns, but may also act as service troops, trainers, messengers or assistants to sergeants and lieutenants or scribes.

Front-line soldier: A conscript or a recruit who has been ordered to the front. Front-line soldiers march in form to the battle, usually against the silent ones in the south border of Nathar or here and there against the rebels.

Petty officer: A soldier who has been in the navy for at least a year. Rows, reefs sails and fights at sea. A petty officer is equal to a conscript.

War healer: In every regiment there is at least one healer. The healer can be anybody with healer skills who is recruited. Usually a woman with no military training, but still between a front-line soldier and a sergeant in rank.

Sergeant: Commands a group, a unit of no more than ten recruits, conscripts or front-line soldiers.

Mate: Commands a group, a unit of no more than ten recruits or petty officers. A mate is equal to a sergeant.

War barber-surgeon: In every division there is at least one barber-surgeon. He acts as a barber, expert of herbs, surgeon, binder of fractures and maker of medicinal potions. Usually war healers serve under war barber-surgeons. Usually no military training, but still higher in rank than a sergeant and a mate.

War wizard: In every regiment and every ship there is at least one wizard. Many wizard apprentices may do their master's demonstration by acting as a war wizard in the army a year. No military training, but still higher in rank than a war barber-surgeon. Charms weapons, tells fortunes, especially needed in the battles against silent ones.

War priest: A priest of Ersius, the god of war, at least one in every regiment and ship. Usually no military training, but still higher in rank than a war wizard.

Knight candidate ("squire"): Acts in the army as a squire, messenger, assistant and servant for knight companions and knight commanders. May also temporarily take care of sergeant's duties.

Lieutenant: Commands a regiment of no more than ten groups (from 10 to 100 front-line soldiers), often of no more than a few groups. Lieutenant is the highest rank for a common man.

Captain: Commands a ship of no more than ten groups (from 10 to 100 petty officers), often of no more than a few groups. A captain is equal to a lieutenant.

Knight: Acts often as a messenger or the servant of noble officers in the army or in the navy. May also temporarily take care of lieutenant's or captain's duties. A knight is at least knight companion in knight rank.

General: Commands a division of no more than ten regiments (from 10 to 1000 front-line soldiers), often of no more than a few regiments. A general is at least a knight commander in knight rank.

Commodore: Commands a detachment of no more than ten ships (from 10 to 1000 petty officers), often of no more than a few ships. A commodore is at least a knight commander in knight rank.

Marshal: Commands a company of no more than ten divisions (from 10 to 10 000 front-line soldiers). Usually at least a count in noble rank.

Admiral: Commands a squadron of no more than ten detachments (from 10 to 10 000 petty officers). Usually at least a count in noble rank.

Commander-in-chief of the army (emperor): Commands all the companies of the army and all the squadrons of the navy.

TRODAI

During the times of the Kingdom, Trodai warriors defended the innocent from evil and the Trodai monks helped those in need. From this group of mysterious warriors the core of the Order of the Golden Lion was formed. The order protected the royal family and taught the farmers how to defend themselves. The Trodai used to stand for safety and stability, nowadays they are considered outlaws. Their name brings fear to the minds of travellers, and the imperial army hunts the Trodai mercilessly.

The Light

In the beginning there was Darkness. And there was only Darkness for an eternity. Then the first Light appeared, lighting up a part of the Darkness and bringing colours and shapes into the darkness. And when this Light first shone upon the world, which had lived in the night until then, the elves of the Earth woke from everlasting sleep. For the elves were the People of Light who see Light even where it does not exist. Elves gain their strength from the Light, they breath it, they eat it. They are of the Light.

Men are born from the earth, and they are bound to the earth. They can never completely be beings of the Light. The Light is however noble and pure, and bears no ill will toward the late-born men. Thus it is possible for men to feel the Light inside them, to touch and breath the Light. Most men forsake that possibility and turn their hearts to pursuit of power, money and a trouble-free existence. But those who can put aside earthly matters and concentrate on bringing balance and goodness to the world, those who can devote themselves to some greater cause, can also feel the Light touching their innermost essence.

The Light gives strength to those who struggle for justice and lead their lives according to the seven virtues. These people are called the “Guardians of the Light”, which is “Trodai” in the old language of the elves. Light and Darkness are in essence the same thing, but from different directions. Darkness is the absence of Light, but Darkness existed before Light. Without Darkness there can be no Light, but Light defeats Darkness. Darkness may also have its followers, and its effects can be like those of Light, but different, distorted even.

The Trodai have the same respect toward gods and other spirit beings that they have for other things in the world. However, the Trodai do not worship gods, but emphasise the importance of one’s skills and the meaning of the Light. If necessary, the Trodai are, however, willing to trade favours with benevolent nature spirits, as with benevolent men. The Trodai consider gods and spirit beings to be on the same level as men in the world order, and they consider it to be wrong in principle to elevate men above the elves and the Light. On the other hand, in practice, belief in gods does bring about many good things.

The virtues

The seven virtues of the Light are honesty, determination, bravery, justness, honour, spirituality and humility. Each person possesses some of the virtues, but no one has all of them or any of the virtues in its entirety. If they claim otherwise, they only prove with their words that they have lost their humility and their honesty. The Trodai strive to live according to the seven virtues knowing that the only ones capable of doing so are the Children of the Light. Nevertheless, striving toward perfection is what makes the Trodai special and is the reason why the Light accompanies the Trodai.

Honesty is being faithful to the truth – the desire not to betray yourself or others. Determination is unquestioning devotion and ability to sacrifice yourself for your beliefs. Bravery is the strength to act according to your convictions, decisions and feelings. Justness is devotion to truth and goodness controlled by compassion. Honour is courage to fight for justice even if it is impossible to win. Spirituality is the concern for your innermost essence and for how you see truth, love and courage. Humility is knowing your place not according to your achievements but according to the value of all individuals.

The stages

The young men and women who show willingness to defend their fatherland, honour and justice, and are not afraid of a frugal life, can seek training from a Trodai master. They will thus become Trodai candidates. During their candidacy they receive basic training in the balancing of the mind, virtues, combat and meditation and they probably take part in various tasks as assistants. The length of the candidacy time is not fixed, as it ends when the Trodai candidate feels that he is a full-fledged Trodai. To show this, he will ask his master to test his skills and abilities, and the master will arrange a test in which the Trodai candidate not only demonstrates his skills but also has to face the demons in the depths of his soul: his weaknesses.

If the candidate passes the test, he will become a true Trodai. The Trodai usually fall into two castes, Trodai warriors and Trodai monks. Both the way of the warrior and the way of the monk will eventually lead to the same destination, but by a different route. The life and training of both castes include physical as well as spiritual exercises, and the differences mainly lie in their skills. The warriors practise use of the sword and take part in daring adventures in the name of their fatherland and freedom. The monks on the other hand only fight unarmed and spend their time studying the Light and helping the less fortunate among them. Recently the number of warriors has been larger than that of the monks, but in ancient times the Trodai monks are said to have offered help wherever there was poverty and distress.

After committing numerous acts of charity and proving their skills in warfare and knowledge of the Light, the council of the seven Trodai masters may summon a Trodai and make him a master. There are at most only seven times seven masters and now fewer than twenty. The masters oversee the progress of the Trodai movement, lead Trodai factions and supervise the recruitment and training of new Trodai candidates.

The seven highest-ranking Trodai form the council of the seven Trodai masters or the Council of Seven. The council leads all Trodai, adapts the movement to suit the changes brought by time and oversees the actions of Trodai across the world. Each member of the council oversees his own territory. They say that there are three grandmasters in Nathar, one in Cruinne, two in other lands of Nathos and one somewhere in the south. The Council of Seven assembles whenever necessary and at least every seven years in full numbers and the council members keep in touch with each other and other masters so that the council members stay informed of each other's movements. In days long past each member of the Council of Seven had a pendant and each pendant represented a virtue. Accordingly, the members of the council are also called the bearers of the Light. However, during the years of chaos and civil war some of the pendants have been lost and some have fallen into the wrong hands. The Council of Seven has not assembled in a long time either.

They say that during the heyday of the Nathos Empire, there were Children of the Light, Trodai seers, who were of the Light within, like the elves. They lived always one at a time, and were born in the times of severe distress. Sometimes centuries passed without a single Child of Light, but always when the Trodai needed help, there was a Child of Light to guide them. When there still were Children of Light, they superseded even the Council of Seven and led all Trodai and led them well. During the last dark years, there was hope especially among the young Trodai of a Child of Light returning, but now even most of them have lost hope.

Trodai and the sword

“Let your feelings swell inside you like a stormy wind, let them strike with all their power, ragingly, but control the direction of the storm: do not unleash it but guide the strength of the wind to a single point, and may that point be the sword in your hand!”

A Trodai tries to live by the seven virtues also when he is fighting for them. However, every Trodai has his weaknesses, and each one has to struggle to balance his self-control with his feelings. The goal is to control yourself and your mind, which leads to observing the virtues and mastering your mind, which improves your battle skills.

Violence, fighting is the last course of action for a Trodai and it is taken when there is no other alternative. Therefore a Trodai will never raise his weapon first, never attack treacherously from hiding or from behind or strike against a defenceless person. He grants his opponent an equal opportunity, a chance to give up the fight or surrender, and he never kills his opponent on purpose if there are ways to avoid it. He allows even his enemies to retain their honour.

According to the principle of equality, a Trodai is always armed with a sword; a bow is considered to be disrespectful toward the enemy. There is a more important reason for the Trodai not to use a bow: the trajectory of an arrow cannot be influenced with the power of mind once an arrow is fired. A Trodai can control his sword at all times: powered by his mind but directed by his hand, from the beginning of a movement to controlling the delivery of the blow. The sword has also a historical significance: the Trodai adhere to tradition rigorously, and throughout the centuries the sword has been the Trodai warrior's weapon.

A Trodai who is in control of his mind can seem concentrated, calm and peaceful on the battlefield. Looks can be deceiving: within, a Trodai may be boiling with rage. He has merely succeeded in controlling the force of his emotions and directing them in the direction of his choice, in this case the use of his sword. He does not waste the power rising from his emotions.

Fear is the feeling that a Trodai will avoid on the battlefield as much as he can. Fear disrupts concentration and takes over the mind: useful feelings are cast aside. If a Trodai loses self-command and control over his mind, he loses his skills as well.

Titles and customs

Trodai address each other by their given names or as Brothers and their masters as Masters. Candidates are always known by their given name. People, who are not part of the Trodai organisation, are addressed normally with appropriate titles.

If they want to show respect toward a non-Trodai they may address them as “honoured”. If they find a non-Trodai to be exceptionally virtuous and want to show their respect, they may also call him or her a “Seeker of the Light”.

Typical Trodai ways of wishing someone well include “May the Light accompany you”, “The Light will reward you”, “May the Light fall upon your way” and “May your virtues never disappear”. Typical curses of the Trodai are “May the Darkness have revenge” and “The Darkness will take its own”.

Usually the Trodai act according to prevailing customs – weddings and funerals are held following Dyanionist rites. However, a special Trodai custom is adhered to in birth. A group of Trodai masters assembles at the naming ceremony to foretell the future of the child. They tell whether the Light is near the child and whether the child’s fate is connected to the Trodai ideology. The foretelling also reveals which virtues of the Light will help the child in his or her life.

Trodai organisation today

Before the revolution, there were Trodai warriors in all of the towns, representing the king as well as the Light. In Gaidava, there was the Order of the Golden Lion, and most of its members were Trodai warriors. Additionally, only those Lion Knights, who were also Trodai, could be appointed as king’s bodyguards. These knights formed a separate Trodai class, and they were called Trodai bodyguards. Many bearers of the Light were formerly bodyguards.

In the revolution, the Trodai warriors were to be the first to be executed alongside the noble who sided with the king. Many of the Trodai died already during the revolution fighting for the king, the royal family and Nathar. Nowadays there are few Trodai warriors, maybe fewer than ever before, and there are not even seven masters in the Council of Seven.

The Trodai operate in secrecy in the woods or small rural villages. Some Trodai have fled abroad to wait for the revolution to gain momentum. They are getting older, and some of them have probably died. Some Trodai keep on fighting. These Trodai forest bandits and agitators keep the rebellion against the emperor alive. On the other hand, it is said that some people trained as Trodai have joined forces with the emperor's supporters, believing that the emperor has been chosen by the Light.

The Trodai have accomplished very little. One by one they are being imprisoned or executed, but new Trodai are being trained deep in the wild forest. However, people seem to be waiting for something, as if the Trodai need a strong leader, maybe a Trodai master or a rebelling warlord, who could reignite the rebellion. Then the Trodai would join forces and act as the generals and heroes of the rebellion.

MAGIC AND WIZARDS

One in every ten people has the gift of magic. These people can, for example, foresee events in dreams, move small objects with the power of their mind and heal wounds with their touch. This ability is weak in most people, and the gift may never surface. They are the lucky ones.

On the other hand, magic flows strongly in some people or the lesser forces may surface by accident. They are called magicians. Ordinary people also call them witches or conjurers. It is possible for all magicians to become wizards, but usually only men are accepted to study magic. If the magician is not willing to devote his life to studying the theory and practice of magic, he may run the risk of going mad: inexperienced magic users may be overwhelmed by magic and become undead incarnations of magic, lisks. These creatures are a danger to themselves and their surroundings, and thus untrained magicians are often avoided and shunned.

The magicians who wish to study magic go to the wizard school of the Highest Tower. There the weak ones are pruned and the best excel. The ordinary people know very little of what happens inside the shining white walls of the Highest Tower, but for some reason most wizards are of a repulsive and unreliable sort.

Studying

The studies begin with the Test that takes some weeks, and all magicians who want to become wizards have to undergo it. The test examines not only the magicians' magic skills but also the strength of their mind, their determination and intelligence. Only about one in every ten tested can study in the Highest Tower, and the rest are deprived of their little magic skills forever. Because of this only very self-assured magicians – or magicians who are fed up with their abilities – apply to study in the tower.

On acceptance into the Highest Tower, the new student is given a wizard name. The name is usually given by an archmage or one of the highest masters, and from then on the student has to use that name and that name only. The name is a single word usually containing a Z, the rune of magic. During his studies or later on, a wizard may be given a nickname, such as Hazal the Miranian, Dizmal of the Shadows or Razik the Elfmind. In these names the Z is pronounced sharply, to resemble the sound of a bee, like in English, not as *ts*.

The student's ordinary day consists of three to five general education lessons (languages, history, algebra, alchemy, astrology, geography etc.), a few lessons on magic theory (the nature of magic and reality, the responsibility of a mage, life and death, other planes etc.) and one or two lessons on the practical use of magic (spells, alchemy, exorcism, rituals etc.). Every day also contains various conventional rituals, eating and sleeping.

The general education proves its worth in the years to come, because it is more and more important to know something about something, preferably everything about everything, for advanced spells. It is easy to conjure up the vision of an apple, but when it is necessary to have light reflect off the apple illusion, to be able to drop it or eat it, it is good to know what will happen. A wizard who knows the human body well can heal broken bones and fractures with a mere transportation spell.

Practical use of magic mostly includes practising spells and conducting controlled tests with magical elements. First-year students may, for example, have to practise the light spell and its numerous variations for an entire year before they can move on to something more interesting. This is not to say that the light spell is exceptionally important or challenging, but the first years of study should focus on the general education and build a foundation for later studies. However, most wizards do become very skilled with the light spell.

After seven years of study, a young student wizard is apprenticed to a master wizard. The apprenticeship will last as long as the master wishes, but usually this period lasts for not less than a year and not more than three years. During this time the apprentice has to do his master's bidding and he has to perform various unpleasant tasks, but he also learns a lot about the practical use of magic.

After the apprenticeship, the student wizard returns to the Highest Tower and begins to work on his master's work. This may be a beautiful new magical object, a study describing a spell's origin or something else, which proves that he is worthy of a wizard's staff. If the archmage and the highest masters approve the work, the student is declared a master wizard in a grand graduation ceremony, and he is awarded the right to use a wizard's staff.

The Highest Tower

No one knows how the Highest Tower has come into existence. According to some legends, it stood in its place when men roamed over the northern glaciers to Almon. Other stories claim that the founder of the wizard school, Sherez the Great, raised it straight up from the ground. No one knows for sure, although some wizards have devoted their entire lives to studying the tower's origin.

The Highest Tower is a huge, bright white tower, which rises up in the centre of the Dark Forest. Its surface is smooth and it shimmers with a bright white light. The construction material of the walls is

neither cloudy crystal, bright mother-of-pearl nor glistening white rock, but something that resembles all of them a little. The tower top disappears into the clouds, and it is said that the gods use the highest floor as their entrance hall. Those who have ascended high enough in the tower have not told of their experience – if they have returned.

There is an entrance hall on the ground level floor of the tower, the Great Hall that is used for eating, the kitchen and an information desk of some sort, where a simple spirit being answers the questions of magicians who have travelled to the tower or lost wanderers. On the first underground floor, there is the vast Library of the Highest Tower. The students' living quarters are beneath the Library. There are guest quarters, temples, the graveyard, a brothel, some magic rings and some spacious sites for experiments in the tower yard. The teachers' and archmage's offices and workspaces are located on the second floor. The next five floors above the second floor are teaching facilities. The next few floors above the teaching floors are laboratory facilities and above those floors are levels that the ordinary student knows very little about. There is talk of pyras, dimensional mirrors, magical gates, dream crystals and similar things. But this sort of talk is to be expected.

Appearance and nature of wizards

Wizards always wear a colourful (never black or white) robe and walk with their staff. The staff is a sort of accumulator of their magical energy and they recharge it every once in a while. Student wizards wear a black robe, a scarf in front of their face and black gloves on their hands. Only their eyes and forehead may be visible. The apprentices of the wizards wear a grey robe. Only a master wizard may use a staff, which is awarded to him at the graduation ceremony.

Wizards often have limited social skills. Many of them are impressive performers or at least try to be, but there are only few charismatic and agreeable wizards. This may partly be due to the hard and strenuous studies in the Highest Tower and the unpleasant tasks performed as a student or as an apprentice. The student's uniform is also very uncomfortable and it is difficult to breathe in it. The harsh conditions are believed to harden the strong minds even more and to create even stronger-willed wizards, but the effects are often quite the opposite.

All magicians are already, in essence, beings of the magic plane already at birth. The dichotomy between the earth and the magic planes becomes larger as the studies progress and the magician becomes more powerful. This is why wizards seem odd to outsiders. They never live in the 'here and now' to the fullest because they have to divide their minds between two realities. Some wizards go mad because of this, some become leeks, and then their minds are completely controlled by the magic plane.

Nature of reality

Reality is divided into different planes. The four planes known to the wizards are called Earth, Air, Fire and Water. Almon, Cruinne and also the Highest Tower are located on the Earth plane. It is sometimes

also called Valenor or the Plane of Men (only among men, however). The Fire plane is called the Abyss, and there reside the pyras and fire creatures. Various spirits and gods live on the Water plane, and it is also called the Plane of the Gods. The Fire and Water planes are because of their basic nature eternally at war with each other. The Air plane is the same as the Magic plane.

On the Magic plane, raw magic flows like air or water do on the Earth plane. There live beings that breathe magic and are formed of magic. They are creatures that ordinary people cannot even imagine. Ordinary people cannot even see them.

Sometimes bubbles or weak currents are left between the planes. Sometimes pyras or spirits show themselves on the Plane of Men, sometimes men are swept away to the Plane of the Gods. Thus also magic flows steadily from the Air or Magic plane to the Earth plane, the Plane of Men, and is mixed into the air in the Earth plane. Thus, magic is everywhere, but where the currents are swiftest, the magic is strongest and easiest to use.

In skilful hands, magic is a valuable natural resource, but flowing raw and unchained it may also cause huge upheavals and distortions of reality. Random rainfalls of fish, ball lightnings, mutants, miracles and such things may very well be caused by eruptions of raw magic.

There is talk of other planes too, but these the wizards have never studied. They say that the elves and Trodai warriors worship a plane that is called the Plane of Light and Darkness (some say that they are two separate planes). They say that dreams and gnomes come from the Plane of Dreams. Sometimes the dead and the unborn are said to wait on the Plane of Time – ordinary people think this plane manifests itself as the Moon. There are theories that claim that all planes are merely different reflections of the Earth plane and that all planes are located on a single, large, common (Magic) plane. Some even claim that there are thousands and thousands of planes and all the stars in the sky are distant planes.

Nature of magic

Magic can never be defined by scientific means (even though some will always try to do so), because it is also art. Thus, the way to complete understanding is seldom possible and never easy.

The significance of magic is also much discussed. The wizards of the Highest Tower see magic as a force controlling nature – and the world. Therefore, the natural mission of wizards is to rule mankind, even if they are not yet ready for it. Preparations have already been made, and Miran and Nathar are ruled by a magic user, and at least in Cruinne a wizard is acting as the ruler's counsellor.

However, according to the Miranian view, magic is a balancing force that should somehow unite people. This view is flawed because, in fact, magic is by definition external to nature; magic is change and expressly imbalance. (They also train women as mages in Miran...)

It is possible to do a huge amount with magic, but according to some, even that is too little. Powerful wizards can control the weather, destroy beings by only touching them, or summon pyras from the Abyss to serve their needs. There are still some things that magic cannot do: it is impossible to travel in

time or space, as is turning invisible or into a completely different being. It is impossible to create a living, intelligent being with magic, and magic cannot raise the dead.

However, the most annoying thing and a common subject of research is achieving immortality. It does not seem at all possible, but many otherwise powerful wizards are absolutely frustrated at the idea of succumbing to death merely because of the deterioration of the body. Many do believe that they can develop the Greatest Spell, which would keep them young and vigorous, while the passing years would only bring strength and influence

The magical runes

There is a great force hidden in all eighteen magical runes, because they are used to control magical powers. Various things are done with runes, but they are not all equally powerful. Usually wizards know only five or six runes well and the rest satisfactorily.

One rune, Ksii, is the Forbidden Rune. The Highest Tower has forbidden the study and teaching of the rune and destroyed all the books containing it. Today no one knows or will tell what it is like, but it is said that with the aid of this rune any man could become a magician.

Spells consist of one or more runes, with which the wizard guides the forces he wants to use. Very different spells can be cast with the same runes, so the wizard's intentions are crucial. If the wizard fails in his spell, for example, by stressing a rune in the wrong way, the spell may in this case be unsuccessful or its effect may be distorted.

When casting spells, it is usually enough to recite the runes out loud, but many wizards improve their concentration with a small ritual or mantra. Some draw the runes in the air, and if the wizard cannot speak for some reason, this is enough to cast the spell. When reciting runes, the wizard's mind visualises the thing described by the runes, and thus spells cannot be cast accidentally by reciting runes.

There are two numbers relating to the rules after the description of the rune. The first one tells how many Magic Points using the runes takes, providing that the rune is known. The second tells how many points it will take if it is used without mastering it.

Rah (): Sign that symbolises perfection and which also means light, life, sun and the magic circle. Because of the last quality mentioned it is used especially in ritual spells as a protective symbol. This rune is usually the one that is used in practising spell-casting early on, because it creates light when recited by itself. (3 / 5)

Far (): Magic connection to other wizards, sometimes also to the silent ones and magicians. Wizard inspectors need the help of this rune to identify magicians. (2 / 4)

Zin (): Rune of magic and air that reflects beauty, diversity and art. One of the most important spell runes. (2 / 4)

Mec (): Rune of planes that reflects the nature of the universe and the diversity of everything. A very important rune in theoretical magic, which studies the nature of the universe, as well as in planar magic, in which the connection of different planes are studied.

Col (): Sign of earth, the ordinary, the mundane. Often used as the symbol of science. (1 / 3)

Ag (): Sign of water, gods, good spirit beings and blessings. Wizards use this sign to protect themselves from the forces of evil. (2 / 4)

Dez (): Sign of fire, pyras and curses. A sign that is rumoured to have been inscribed on the gates of the Abyss. (2 / 4)

Eth (): In some direction (which is pointed to with a finger or staff). Many spells require this rune, so that they can be cast within sight – otherwise they require directly touching the target. (4 / 10)

Gyn (): Sign used in summoning spells. The form of the rune means rising, but beings can be summoned from both above and below. Sometimes also drawn as a diagonal cross. (5 / 8)

Ulm (): Sign of sending. Opposite of Gyn. This rune is for returning beings to where they came from. This rune should always be learned before Gyn, even though it is done rarely. (4 / 10)

Lon (): Rune of giving and binding. Magic objects can be made and long-term spells and curses can be cast with this rune. Can be used to mark an object, if the spell requires a target. (3 / 8)

Iz (): Lightnings and magnetism. (4 / 8)

Chir (): Sign depicting the body. Used in most spells directed at the body, such as healing and attacking spells. (3 / 5)

Yrth (): Rune of emotions and moods, which can be used to cause joy and courage, as well as loathing and fear.

(4 / 7)

Nall (): Moving, helps for example in moving heavy objects. (3 / 5)

Onth (): Sign of good health and happiness. This sign is used to cure diseases. It is also used as a general symbol of happiness and success. (3 / 5)

Toz (): Sign of diseases. This sign is used to cause diseases. It is also used as a general symbol of misfortune and poor success. It is the opposite of Onth. (3 / 5)

Vol (): Sign of death, darkness and the moon. Some masters of this rune believe they can find the secret to eternal life or raise the dead. Most use it to examine dead bodies, and sometimes to kill. (3 / 5)

Ksii (): The Forbidden Rune, with the help of which anyone can use magic. For centuries the Forbidden Rune has been forgotten as well as illegal.

THE NOBLES

There are numerous noble families in Nathar, and many of them have sat on the throne as well. All the nobles and many townspeople know the most important twelve noble families. They also know how to address nobles of various degrees, and it is also their duty to teach good manners to people visiting from the country.

Noble titles

The nobility of both parents is inherited by their first born. If the oldest child is unfit for some reason, the nobility can be inherited by some other child as well. However, only a landowning noble's nobility is hereditary, so, for example, an errant knight's son is only of high birth, a common person from a noble family. A person such as this can be called a baron, or a baroness, and he does not have to pay taxes. His children are ordinary commoners.

All nobles are addressed formally, except among very close friends, and even then only if no one else is present.

The highest of the nobles is naturally the emperor. Princes, dukes, counts and knights, from the highest ranking to the lowest, are subservient to the emperor. The emperor is addressed as "your imperial majesty" or "your majesty". Although Emperor Zangavius has no children or an empress for a wife, they would be addressed as "your imperial highness". A child of the emperor who does not own land is called a prince or a princess.

When there still were kings, they were addressed as "your royal majesty" or "your majesty" and other members of the royal family as "your royal highness". A king's wife is a queen, and the children are princesses or princes. The children of princes and princesses were usually made princes or dukes either by direct appointment or through marriage.

A prince still rules one of Nathar's provinces. So there is the King of Vakar, the Kings of Ghedos, Thelar and Nodos and the Prince of Sondar, who is the emperor. A female prince or a prince's wife is called a princess. Princes are addressed as "your highness". Most princes grant their younger children a duchy from their lands, making them dukes or duchesses. A prince's landless children are called lord or lady.

A duke or duchess rules a fief and the villages belonging to it, usually from a castle, which is surrounded by a village and sometimes even by a town. The dukes are subordinate to the princes, but the duke of the provincial capital is the prince himself. Dukes are addressed as "your grace". The dukes often grant their younger children a count's manor from their land, which makes the children counts or countesses. The landless children of the duke are lords or ladies.

In most villages of a fief there is a manor, from which the count or countess rules the village. The counts of Nathar are of little importance from a national point of view, but in their village they have great power. Most counts and countesses are former knights, appointed to rule a village after rising in the knights' ranks. In North Nathar counts are sometimes also called earls in the old-fashioned way. People subordinate to the counts address them as "my master" or "my mistress", while their superiors call them "your excellency". The younger children of counts are lords or ladies.

Lords and ladies are landless nobles, whose younger children have no title. For example, through knighthood they may become counts and they can naturally marry above them. Lords and ladies are addressed as "your excellency".

The senators are all nobles, often siblings of princes or dukes. Mayors are typically nobles loyal to the duke, and they take care of a town. Bailiff is also a title used of a noble who looks after a count's or a duke's castle. Mayors and bailiffs are usually lords or ladies.

Outside the borders of Nathar there are two grand duchies, which are part of the Nathar empire, but more loosely than the actual provinces: South Ghedos, which is the Ghedos that was formerly part of Dantos, is the newer one, and Lagar, which is beyond the Sea of Shadows, is more scattered. A governor appointed by the grand duke, the emperor of Nathar, rules both grand duchies. Under the governor's rule, the grand duchy is divided into fiefs ruled by dukes in the same way as the provinces. Governors are usually younger children of princes, and have been appointed to this position, which is not hereditary, by the emperor. Governors are addressed like princes, but officially princes are of higher rank.

It is not uncommon for someone to have several titles, which are used in the most formal situations. In these situations magic, academic and religious titles are added to the noble titles. The emperor's name is written in declarations and laws as: "We Zangavius I the Great, by divine mercy the Emperor and Sovereign of all Nathar, Prince of Sondar, and the Grand Duchies of South Ghedos and Lagar, Master of Magic in the Highest Tower, Honorary Doctor of Law in the Gaidava Academy and promoted to the Deity by the Church of Dysanius, hereby inform all our loyal subjects that..."

Life of the nobles

Land-owning nobles have a lot of work, which can be summarised into two duties: protecting their subordinates and paying taxes to their master. Usually bailiffs, wizards, priests, sheriffs and knights try to deal with these matters, but often the nobles have to supervise the building of castle walls, see to the taxation, solve disputes between their subordinates, train their knights and such things. A lot of time is also spent on organising celebrations and other events to maintain their reputation among other nobles and powerful people in the region. Especially young people spend a part of their time learning to ride, fence, practising archery, reading, court etiquette and similar things.

However, most of the nobles' time is spent socialising and participating in different amusements. Every evening the manor and castle inhabitants eat well, and travelling storytellers, musicians, theatrical companies, jesters and animal trainers entertain them and their guests. Every guest is a welcome novelty, who is asked about the events of the world and his own adventures. At least once a week the count, duke or prince gives a celebration to which he invites the higher-ranking nobles, priests, wizards, merchants and officials of his village or town. If important guests come or another excuse can be found, the celebration may become a real banquet, in which wine and fat flow.

Nobles like to visit their relatives, friends and neighbours. The longer the journey takes, the longer the stay, and there is no polite way to ask a guest of this sort to leave. Some stoop to shrewd plotting to make their unwanted guests to leave: some try to marry a gay duke to their lusty daughter, some try to make the countess think that pyras have attacked her village.

The days are often spent on hobbies. The most popular hobby, especially among the knights, is the tournament, in which knights measure their skills against each other. Even the smallest tournament lasts for several days and dozens of knights participate. All the inhabitants of the duchy who are able will come to watch the event, and some will come from even further afield. These smaller tournaments are usually organised by a count or a duke. There can be thousands of knights in the largest tournaments from all the kingdoms of men, and the celebrations last at least a month. Only the richest

princes can afford to organise such great tournaments, but in the past the king used to organise the great May Struggle, which began on the first of Bud month and lasted long into Forest month.

The many forms of hunting are more of an everyday amusement. Some prefer hounds and riding, some hunt with bows on foot, some like falcons. Hunting trips are not for acquiring food, but to display skills and strength – the servants still carry the spoils home of course. Many nobles have hunting lodges and gamekeepers, who make sure that there are enough deers and foxes to be hunted. Sometimes, when they are bored, the madly brave knights may also hunt pyras if they know there are hollows inhabited by them nearby.

Not all hobbies are outdoor activities. Many nobles are trained wizards, priests, masters or doctors of philosophy, and they may study magical or religious writings to pass the time or experiment with alchemy or physics. It is not at all uncommon for a noble to think he is very civilised and intelligent and to invite masters of magic, professors or high priests as his guests, who have to discuss the noble's embarrassing theories.

Among the nobles, a common pastime is the king of games, chess, so the pieces made of wood, stone or bone and the board can be found in each and every castle. Some also take up embroidery, sculpture or composing.

Noble families

There are twelve influential noble families in Nathar. These families include all the princes and imperial families, and many dukes as well. Smaller noble families are often less important branches or allies of grand families. Most noble families publicly side with the emperor, but many also have secret plans and internal conflicts.

Many noble families also have relatives abroad, especially in Dantos, the southern families also have relatives in Eksos and Miran, the northern ones in Gethar and the families of the western coastal towns have relatives in Cruinne. At the moment, the most influential family is the Narathils, but the Cassandros family also has a lot of support.

Sergius: Philosophers and warriors who were on the throne for longer than any other family. Members of the Sergius family are known as strong-willed and wise rulers. The family has a lot of influence in Nodos and Vakar. Former Dukes of Ador.

Cassandros: A family mocked as rural nobles by some, but nevertheless, its members have become priests, scientists and senators. Quite influential in Vakar, Nodos, Thelar and Gethar. The family of the Queen's father, Prince of Nodos, Governor of Gurnova and King of Gethar.

Luvian: Many Luvians are weak spiritually and physically, but some branches are starting to become stronger. Have ruled as emperors in the distant past. Plotters, artists, thinkers, priests and wizards. Influential in Thelar, Sondar, Ghedos and Miran. Duke of Erkor. It is said that the Luvian family is in league with the Miran family.

Arathuin: A royalist family that is known for its close ties with the Trodai warriors. Most influential in the provinces of Thelar, Sondar and Ghedos. During the king's reign, they were known for their courage and loyalty. The family were regents once in the past. The former Duke of Nathova and Duke of Garburg in Dantos.

Elybrian: The first imperial family that included for example Valius the Unifier. Now the Elybrian family has withered to a few branches that include many famous knights. The family is influential in Sondar, Ghedos and to some extent in Miran and Dantos. The husband of the king's sister, Duke of Sereva and Duke of Jonova in Dantos.

Geryon: A rich but aimless family, whose members are not known for their loyalty to the family. It is said that a great leader could unite the Geryon and guide them to lead all the families. Twice in the past, one of the families' branches produced an emperor. Warriors, knights, adventurers, priests. Influential in Sondar, Ghedos, Nodos and Dantos. The wife of the king's brother, the new Duke of Nathova and Duchess of Milos in Dantos.

Briarius: A family that has raised more wizards than any other noble family. Originally from Miran, now the family has spread also to Thelar and Sondar. The Briarius family ruled the empire, when Nathos was fighting the silent ones. The family has divided: some side with the Highest Tower, others with the wizards of Miran. The Highest Tower's Archmage, Duchess of Sangorn, Governor of South Ghedos.

Narathil: Strong-willed, determined leaders, have also been emperors as well. Now, however, they are completely loyal to Emperor Zangavius. Priests, knights, seafarers, rulers, wizards. Influential in all parts of Nathar, as well as in Dantos and Gethar. The Narathil have an alliance with the Highest Tower. Princess of Thelar (Duchess of Tolova) and Prince of Olanos in Dantos.

Pelorian: Determined, vigorous, straightforward. Have been emperors, embittered by the loss of their position to the Sergius family. Priests, knights, wizards, Trodai warriors. Influential in Ghedos, Nodos and Dantos. Prince of Ghedos (Duke of Margova), Governor of Lagar, Duke of Guthmark (earlier also Prince of South Ghedos).

Gaidavius: Artists and bureaucrats holding a lot of political power but owning little land. Influential in Sondar and Eksos. Duke and Mayor of Gaidava.

Thalios: A brave and loyal noble family, whose members take pride in being the best in whatever they undertake. Many indeed are successful knights or Trodai warriors; others are influential wizards, priests or artists. Thalios have influence in Vakar, Nodos, Thelar, and Gethar. The old and new Prince of Vakar (Duke of Deneva).

Veladina: Aristocratic and honourable family that cherish tradition. Some think of the family as old-fashioned and stagnant, but nevertheless the family is revered by many. Some of the Veladina yearn for a return to the time of the king; others regard the rule of Zangavius as a new dawn of the Empire. Influential in Nodos and Ghedos, as well as in Dantos. The new Princess of Nodos (Duchess of Sarkos). In Dantos: Duke of Thegard, Duchess of Kados.

Other noble families

The most important foreign noble families are the royal family of Miran, the Davorians, and the royal family of Dantos, the Palthuins. Both families naturally have branches in Nathar as well. There are other, less significant noble families that are mentioned below.

Petronius: The Duke of Bralon. Prince of Tanthar (Duke of Barostan).

Davorion: Wizard, father of the Prince of Nodos. Queen of Miran.

Kreon: Priests. Prince of Malthos (Duke of Olanos).

Kathadruin: Trodai warriors. The current Duke of Ador.

Palthuins: The Priest-King of Dantos (Prince of Shados, Duke of Paldova).

a Duich: King of Cruinne

Adorius: Trodai warriors, scholars and priests. Very influential in the duchy of Ador.

Dantorius: An ancient Dantos family, merchants and rulers.

The ruling families

Seven families have ruled Nathos and Nathar since the times of Valius the Unifier Elybrian. First the Elybrian, then the Geryon, Briarius, Luvian, Narathil, again the Geryon and then the Pelorian family. After the last empress, the son of Hadadria the Oppressor Pelorina decided to grant Dantos independence and abdicated the imperial throne. In the process, he changed his name from Aldrion Pelorian to Aldrion Sergus after his father's family. For hundreds of years, the royal family of Sergius ruled Nathar, until Emperor Zangavius seized power from them.

Imperial family of Elybrian

I.1.I–I.3.X Emperor Valius the Unifier Elybrian

I.3.X–I.4.VI Empress Hadronia the Red Elybrina

I.4.VI–I.4.IX Empress Lusia the Observer Elybrina

I.4.IX–I.8.III Empress Thesea the Great Elybrina

I.8.III–I.9.IV Emperor Lusius the Feared Elybrian (Empress Thesea's grandson)

I.9.IV–I.10.V Emperor Julius the Womanless Elybrian

I.10.V–I.10.IX Empress Lusia II the Doomed Elybrina (Julius's sister)

I.10.IX–I.11.VIII Emperor Shertos the Just Elybrian (died of a lung disease as the last of his branch)

Imperial family of Geryon

I.11.VII–II.2.III Empress Silvia the Iron Belt Geryona

II.2.III–II.3.VI Emperor Lusius the Fat Geryon

II.3.VI–II.4.III Empress Honia the Black Geryona

II.4.III–II.4.X Empress Lusia the Suresword Geryona (Honia's sister)

II.4.X–II.6.IV Emperor Lusius II the Lion Geryon

II.6.IV–II.8.II Emperor Valius the Swordsman Geryon

II.8.II–II.9.II Empress Lentia the Axehand Geryona (died as the last of her branch at the hands of the silent ones)

Imperial family of Briarius

II.9.II–II.11.XI Emperor Zebaoth the Miranian Briarius
 II.11.XI–III.1.III Empress Pari Maroth Purple Cloak Briaria
 III.1.III–III.3.XII Emperor Arzames The Wizard Briarius
 III.3.XII–III.5.XII Empress Artemisia the Fierce Briaria
 III.5.XII–III.7.X Empress Ezter the Negotiator Briaria (Artemisia's stepsister)
 III.7.X–III.7.XII Emperor Arzames II the Expectant Briarius (Ezter's grandson)
 III.7.XII–III.9.IV Empress Pari Maroth II the Sure Briaria (named her relative Mortisia Luvinan as her successor)

Imperial family of Luvian

III.9.IV–III.9.V Empress Mortisia the Grim Luvina
 III.9.V–III.9.VIII Emperor Valius the Young Luvian
 III.9.VIII–III.12.III Empress Artemisia the Gloomy Luvina
 III.12.III–IV.3.XI Empress Silvia the Poet Luvina
 IV.3.XI–IV.5.VI Emperor Arzames the Bloody Luvian (Silvia's nephew)
 IV.5.VI–IV.6.XI Emperor Aldrion the Madman Luvian
 IV.6.XI–IV.7.III Empress Ledia the Bloodless Luvian
 IV.7.III–IV.7.V Emperor Valius II the Persecuted Luvian (Ledia's nephew, killed by his sister, driven into exile, family branch withered)

Imperial family of Narathil

IV.7.V–IV.10.V Emperor Driados the Strong Narathil
 IV.10.V–V.1.IV Empress Daria the Great Narathil
 V.1.IV–V.1.VIII Emperor Darius the Old Narathil
 V.1.VIII–V.4.I Emperor Eruvius the Defender Narathil (Died at the hands of Pyra king Dugankii)

Second imperial family of Geryon

V.4.I–V.4.X Empress Lusia II Pyra Slayer Geryona
 V.4.X–V.5.IV Empress Daria the Shrewd Geryona
 V.5.IV–V.5.V Empress Lusia III the Young Geryona (fell in battle against the orcs of Cruinne)

Imperial family of Pelorian

V.5.V–V.6.XI Emperor Lusius the Gaidavian Pelorian
 V.6.XI–V.7.XII Empress Hadadria the Oppressor Pelorina (his son Aldrion took his father's family name)

The royal family of Sergius

V.7.XII–V.8.XII King Aldrion the Reformer Sergius
 V.8.XII–V.12.III Queen Julia the Just Sergia
 V.12.III–V.12.IX King Driados the Old Sergius
 V.12.IX–VI.1.XII Queen Daria the Elfmind Sergia
 VI.1.XII–VI.3.VI King Thanos the Beautiful Sergius
 VI.3.VI–VI.3.VII King Aldrion II Black Cloak Sergius
 VI.3.VII–VI.3.VIII Queen Eruvia the Virgin Sergia (Aldrion II's sister)
 VI.3.VIII–VI.4.VIII King Thanos II Warlord Sergius (brother of Eruvia)
 VI.4.VIII–VI.8.IV King Aldrion III the Prayer Sergius
 VI.8.IV–VI.10.III Queen Aldria the Serious Sergia (Aldrion III's grandson, founds the senate)

VI.10.III-VI.10.VI King Aldrion IV the Helpless Sergius (Aldria's brother)
 VI.10.VI-VI.11.V Queen Rosalia the Stubborn Sergia
 VI.11.V-VI.11.IX King Thanos III Black Beard Sergius
 VI.11.IX-VI.11.XII Regent Julius Arathuin Sergius (on behalf of his son Aldrion V)
 VI.11.XII-VII.1.XI King Aldrion V the Young Sergius (Thanos III's brother)
 VII.1.XI-VII.4.III Queen Daria II the Farsighted Sergia
 VII.4.III-VII.4.IX Last king of Nathar Aldrion VI the Wise Sergius (died in the revolution)

Imperial family of Zangavius

VII.4.IX- Emperor Zangavius the Great (origin unknown)

Queen's relatives

Queen Lusía Kassandra Sergia
 Queen's father Prince of Nodos XXI Lusius Kassandra
 Queen's mother Sheila tyr Reghail a Baradrich Kassandra (daughter of a Cruinnean count)
 Queen's father's father Prince of Nodos XX Lusius Kassandra
 Mother of Queen's father Klaudia Luvian Kassandra (Tro dai warrior)
 Queen's sister Princess of Nodos XXII Lusía Kassandra
 Husband of Queen's sister Zandros Davorion Kassandra (wizard)
 Queen's sister's son, the Prince of Nodos XXIII Timon Kassandra (imprisoned during the revolution)

King's children

Princess Daria Sergia
 Prince Aldrion Sergius
 Princess Miranda Sergia

King's siblings

Brother Prince Dainos Sergius
 Brother's wife Serovia Kreon Sergia (priestess)
 Brother's firstborn daughter Aurora Sergia
 Brother's youngest child Pasifía Sergia
 Sister Princess Ghadia Sergius
 Sister's husband Eldrius Elybrian Sergius (Tro dai bodyguard)
 Sister's firstborn son Elrdius Sergius
 Sister's firstborn daughter Daria Sergia
 Sister's youngest child, son Thanos Sergius

KNIGHTS

The oldest child of a noble family inherits his parents' position and title, but the younger siblings have to work for their title. Typical possibilities are pursuing an academic career, becoming a priest, a wizard or a knight, or marrying a noble who has established his position.

Before he chooses his career, a young noble will receive a lot of training in court etiquette, history, laws of the state, science, magic and the arts, as well as fencing, riding, hunting and other more active pursuits.

Around the age of ten, noble boys and girls will settle on the occupation that they will spend the rest of their lives pursuing – unless marriage or the death of an older sibling raises their value. Some may also lose their noble title, for example if they commit treason. Some may abandon their nobleness of their own will, for example, when they fall in love with a commoner.

A knight starts out as a squire or a knight candidate. It is possible to become a squire anytime, just as long as a knight will accept the youth as his assistant. The relationship between the squire and the knight varies a lot: sometimes it is strictly practical, sometimes very close. Because many knights are in the imperial army, they prefer young boys to girls as squires, but on the other hand, there are women-only orders of knighthood.

A squire is dubbed a knight in a grand ceremony, when he has come of age. Knight captain or any count, duke, prince, or, naturally, the emperor himself can dub a knight.

In many locations knights act as the personal guards of the nobles, but especially orders of knights strive to perform daring tasks, such as killing pyras or preserving the peace.

Usually knights spend a part of their lives leading the imperial army, a part in their noble family's or their master's castle and a part roaming as a knight errant around the country. Some knights errant travel in disguise, but it is more common in the countryside to run into impostors, who claim to be knights.

Knights are highly respected in the countryside as well as in the towns. They are treated as honoured guests, and people hope that knights can help their region in any problems they might have and that the knights will take command of the local army detachments. Sometimes, however, visiting knights merely exploit the hospitality of ordinary people and leave after getting all the village girls pregnant.

Knight ranks

Knight candidate or squire

A young noble boy or girl, who is serving and being protected by a knight, studies the knights' rules of honour until an order or a noble, who is at least a duke in noble rank, dubs him a knight. Is allowed to carry a sword, but not armour or a shield. Can use the same coat of arms as the knight he serves.

Knight companion

A recently dubbed young knight. Serves the nobleman that dubbed him knight as a bailiff. Soldiers (usually lieutenants) who have proved themselves on the battlefield can also be dubbed knight companions, but this usually calls for very impressive feats of valour, and even then other knights often look down upon these "upstarts". Is allowed to carry a knight's sword and a shield and to use his order's or his master's coat of arms on his tabard, pennant and shield.

Knight errant

A knight who is not a member of an order and does not serve a nobleman. Some are wandering knights who do not spend time on the lands they reign over or who for some reason have lost their land or even their honour. Is allowed to carry a knight's sword and a shield, but not to use coats of arms. A knight errant has to afford to pay for his own equipment.

Knight commander

A respected member of an order, who has proved himself in numerous battles. Becoming a commander takes at least five years after being dubbed a knight. Is allowed to carry a knight's sword and a shield and also to use the imperial coat of arms on his tabard, pennant and shield. Often act as sheriffs, generals or commodores and usually are subordinate to a duke.

Knight captain

A knight who leads a party of knights or an order (even though orders are usually led by a duke). Such knights also rule and tax their own little piece of land and often act as counts of small villages. Knight captains have been knights for at least seven years. Is allowed to carry a sword and a shield and also to use his own coat of arms on his tabard, pennant and shield.

Orders of knighthood

Most knights are in the service of a noble or an order of knighthood. An order is in principle a group outside the nobles' influence, and it is usually dedicated to a specific task. A knight captain, a duke or a prince who may also have ordinary vassal knights in addition to his order usually leads an order.

Usually belonging to an order is regarded as a matter of honour, and a young knight companion will become a knight commander, when he is made a member of an order. In many orders this is preceded by a task or a heroic deed, with which the knight proves he is worthy of membership.

Some knights leave their order because of disagreements or for personal reasons. Thus, they become knights errant, until they join some other order. This is not always easy, because there are also a lot of disagreements between orders.

A knight who belongs to an order of knighthood can nearly at any given time go to the castle of a knight who belongs to the same order and borrow money and equipment, because the orders have detailed records of their members' possessions. Debts are free of interest, because this is merely regarded as a practice that makes controlling possessions easier, because the knights do not have to carry everything with them.

Some of the most significant orders:

Order of the Eagle: "Eagle knights" are personal guards to the emperor, and their main task is to protect the emperor. It is said that Eagle knights act as some sort of secret police, keeping an eye on officials, officers and the clergy. Occasionally "Eagles" also undertake various important tasks in Nathar, when they may act as legislators, judges and executioners. This is why these knights, wearing black tabards embroidered with a silver eagle, are feared in every corner of Nathar. Many Eagle knights

are from abroad, because thus they will have no ties to Nathar's domestic politics. Usually they are from Dantos or Gethar.

Order of the White Rose: An order that has undertaken protection of Nathar's residents from pyras as their primary task. They sometimes send expeditions to hollows inhabited by pyras and vow that some day they will make the journey all the way down to Hell waging their holy war there, until every pyra is dead. The White Rose knights take a vow of chastity, according to which they live and die as virgins, do not use intoxicating substances and do not eat to excess. They must always act in a restrained way and show respect to all people. These knights can be recognised by their white tabards, which have a rose-red coat of arms figure and inside it a white rose.

Order of the Copper Eye: This order is made up of nobles who are fully trained wizards and who have decided to lead a knight's life after becoming a wizard. "Copper Eyes" regard wizard training as equal to the squire period and will dub any noble wizard a knight. Nathar wizards are almost all men, but some noble women may be accepted to the Highest Tower to study, and some Miranian noble female wizards have joined the order. Copper Eye wizard knights are secretive, but they are known to persecute men who worship pyras, false gods or elves. It is often said that Copper Eye knights are searching for some long lost magic objects. Copper Eyes have bad relations with nearly all other orders, although they do cooperate with the knights of the Northern Lights and the Swan knights. Most knights wear a tabard and wizards wear a cloak, but Copper Eyes have a piece of clothing that is a combination of both, and it resembles a sleeveless or a short-sleeved coat. The coat is dark turquoise with a violet two-headed dragon embroidered on it. If the coat is open, it looks as if there are two one-headed dragons on it that are looking in opposite directions. In addition, Copper Eye knights have a wizard's staff in one hand and a knight's sword in the other.

Order of the Golden Lion: Nowadays declared outlawed, in the past an order led by the king of Nathar, into which only the greatest heroes of the kingdom were accepted as members. Many noble Trodai warriors were members of the Golden Lions. "The Lion knights" acted mostly as the king's bodyguards and companions, but from time to time also performed feats of valour from slaying dragons to expeditions. Golden Lion knights wore dark purple tabards with the golden lion of Nathar on it.

Order of the Singing Sword: An order fighting the silent ones, which loves forests and has long traditions of securing the south eastern border of Nathar. Nowadays these "singing knights" are few and dispersed, but many noble children want to join them to defend their country from the silent ones. In the order there is a strong belief that the silent ones would be easy to kill with Londebres, the Singing Sword forged by armourer Waldior. Londebres has been missing for a long time, but many Singing Sword knights are said to have found it, saved innocent people from the claws of the silent ones with it and tragically lost it again after often being killed by the treachery of someone close to them. Singing Sword knights often spend long periods in the forests and they have close ties with many nature spirits. Singing knights have a green tabard with a golden oak leaf on it.

Order of the Three Ravens: A small order in Nathar, which exceptionally accepts only female knights as its members. Knights of the Three Ravens are also known as knights of Golos, for they serve the God of Death and Moon. In practice they strive not to let the innocent die in vain and hope that they themselves will die bravely in battle. The order acts often quite secretly and has created a lot of suspicion and formed a bad reputation: some claim that the Knights of the Three Ravens are traitors, others claim them to be pyra worshipers – always behind their backs, because these knights are willing to fight to the death at all times. Knights of the three Ravens wear a dark blue tabard with a picture of three black ravens on a silver-coloured full moon.

Order of Cruinne: A decayed order formed of Cruinne noblemen that maintains some kind of order in Cruinne. Their commander is one of the five lords of Cruinne and thus directly subordinate to the king there. Occasionally they can also be seen in Nathar, where they are treated with reserve, although some act in a perfectly honourable way. Many nobles exiled from Nathar have joined the Cruinne knights. The knights wear a white tabard with a burgundy-red Maltese cross.

The Swan Order: A seafaring order. Many of its members are officers of Nathar's fleet. Swan knights fight pirates and sea monsters, and many of the older members of the order are known as dragonslayers. The main goal of the order is to find the lost island of Anglor and bring back the great king Aurelion. However, Anglor is invisible and continuously changes its location – it is said that nature spirits allow it to become visible once every seven years. Swan knights have a grey tabard with a white swan on a blue coat of arms.

Order of the Northern Lights: An order having its headquarters in Nathar, which regards its task to be the outpost of Men in case the monsters decide to return to Valenor. They often travel in the Badlands and on the Gore Mountains fighting pyras and orcs. In Gethar, the Knights of the Northern Lights are respected and regarded as the protectors of innocent people. The Knights of the Northern Lights wear a purple tabard decorated with a picture of a white reindeer.

DYSANIONISM

Most people in Nathar and everyone in Dantos are Dyanionist by religion, which means that they worship the gods in the way that the priest Dysanius taught in days long past. Dyanionists bow before the gods and obey them, worshipping them in a disinterested manner. Occasionally they pray to the gods for help, and the gods help them if they wish to do so. Many Dyanionists in fact think of their gods in the same way as a resident of a small village thinks of the prince of his province – they are rarely seen aristocrats, whom you have to obey, but who will however defend their own people against outsiders.

On particular holidays and in extremely dire circumstances, a small sacrifice is made or a ritual is performed to keep the favour of the gods. It is rare to ask gods for favours, because they are short-tempered and do not think kindly of arrogant people. However, gods are not cruel or unappeasable, but they regard their main task to be taking care of the balance of nature. The state of Nathar favours Dyanionism and others are regarded as heathens, but there are no religious persecutions. In Dantos, on the other hand, the spreading of un-Dyanionist beliefs is severely punished.

The symbol of Dyanionism is an arrowhead, on which there is a straight or a slightly arched horizontal line. This depicts the Mountain of Gods and the Celestial Dome above it.

Priests' duties

Each god gathers worshipers and supporters, who are led by priests. The tasks of the priests are performing the gods' services, performing ceremonies, spreading religious knowledge, removing heathen influences and guiding their god's power.

In towns, there are temples devoted to one or many gods, where priests perform the ceremonies of worship. In the countryside, however, priests spend their time mostly travelling from one village to another carrying out naming ceremonies, marriages, funerals and other sacred functions. Although all the priests have in principle dedicated themselves to a specific god, especially the rural priests – and priests, who have to look after the temples of all the gods – perform ceremonies of all the gods. Priests in towns have the possibility to devote themselves more deeply to their own god.

Priests are persons, who have been called to the priesthood by their god or who have been chosen as children to be trained as priests in a temple. Typically, a priest is fully qualified when he has studied for about ten years and has reached maturity.

Priests have many different tasks. They act as the spiritual leaders of their people, help the people to solve problems, teach about the will of the gods and lead rituals. Priests may also teach divine oracles, healers, blood stauncher and seers to accept their gifts. Often they also try to recruit these supernatural people as priests. The priests also lead the people against pyratongues.

The priests of different gods can look very different and perform very different rituals. Warrior priests, who carry a sword themselves, follow Ersius. In the temples of Venita, people sacrifice to the goddess by having sex. The priests of Golos shave their heads and speak to ravens. Priests of Geros, on the other hand, live in the forests among the animals.

Organisation of the Dyanionist church

It all began from Dysanius himself about a thousand years ago. He travelled around preaching in Thelar and Sondar and his deeds are written down in the Book of Dysanius, sometimes also called simply the Book. Dysanius was a powerful divine oracle, who was followed by priests, mystics, wizards, healers, and other divine oracles. Dysanius chose one of these followers as his successor, who was given the title dysan.

Even today, the Dyanionist church of Sarkos is led by a divine oracle who is trained as a priest, Dysan Gersvinda II. To assist the dysan there is the council of Sarkos that consists of archbishops, each of who supervises the priests in one province of Nathar or Dantos. Earlier there were archbishops also in Eksos, Miran, Gethar and Cruinne, but because there were only a few priests serving under them, they are now called simply bishops and do not have the right to attend the council of Sarkos. In Dantos, every fief has its own bishop, who is the head of all the village priests and who bows to the archbishop of his province.

In each provincial capital, there is a cathedral, which is the temple of all the gods, and is led by the archbishop. In addition, there are smaller, more specialised temples in the towns. Most villages have only one temple.

Usually every duke and count has in his village at least one Dyanionist priest who is directly subordinate to the province's archbishop. If there are several priests in the village, the one who is oldest or of highest position is the high priest and the other priests are his subordinates. The student priests act as temple servants. A divine oracle can become a priest without training.

Divine oracles and temple trainees are ordained in a ceremony, where they recite chapters from the Book of Dyanius and are then dipped into water. When they rise from the water, they are Dyanionist priests, and the archcardinal, bishop or high priest declares them disciples of Dyanius.

The most important job of the dyan and the council of Sarkos is to see that the teachings of the book of Dyanius are followed and that the book is copied meticulously. Sometimes the council of Sarkos can also decree the application of the teachings of Dyanius to new situations – the last time this happened was when Emperor Zangavius was declared a god.

NEUKAISM: THE PATH OF A THOUSAND MASKS

The Path of a Thousand Masks is a sect that was originally born inside the main church of Nathar, Dyanionism, and that has gathered a lot of support especially among the rural population. The Path of a Thousand Masks was founded a few hundred years ago by a woman called Neukwalda, and therefore the followers of the Path are sometimes called Neukaists.

The Neukaists believe in balance and equality, in the cycle of life and time and in people's ability to speak directly to their gods. For the Neukaists, time is always repeating itself, life follows birth, death follows life and after death there is another birth. This cycle is seen as well in nature and in life, as well as, for example, in politics: a new king is crowned, he rules and then dies, after which the next ruler starts to rule.

Similarly, they believe that the power of a king, emperor or count does not come from the gods, but from the people. The ruler belongs to the elite of his people and he embodies the hopes, problems and strengths of the people. (This idea has given rise to many plays and songs about kings.) Therefore, it is also the right of the people to overthrow a bad ruler, if a better one is available. This point of view and the many small peasant rebellions have not helped to increase the popularity of Neukaism among the rulers.

Of course, the Neukaists understand the value of the nobles as a ruling class, who are in many ways better than the common people. However, the nobles also heighten many of the bad features of the people and it is advisable to rise against these nobles for the sake of better ones.

The nobles in general are against Neukaism, and in Dantos it is even forbidden in many places. Perhaps because of this, Neukaist temples are usually built in the wilderness or near small villages, and only rarely in towns. Neukaism is most common in Eastern and Southern Nathar, especially near the Sea of Shadows. Dyanionist priests consider Neukaists to be heretics.

Among the common people, few have a clear religious belief. Most are educated in Dyanionism, but they can also honour certain customs and teachings of Neukaism. Sometimes the conversion work of

the Neukaist priests is successful, and the peasants start to believe in themselves more and dares to demand more of their gods and their rulers.

The symbol of Neukaism is two swirls that are against each other and are joined at the top. Some think that it also represents the horns of a bull.

Neukwalda

Neukwalda is sometimes also called Neukal. She is a mysterious woman, and many stories are told about her. Some say that she is a love child of Venita and a human warrior, others that she was originally a swan spirit.

All the stories agree that Neukwalda taught in Sarkos and its vicinity about 300 years ago. The Dysan and the town governor did not like her teachings and she was driven away. The following years she spent wandering through the countryside spreading her teachings. Some Dysanionist priests, divine oracles and other mystics began to follow her and call themselves Neukaists. They founded some small temples, where they worshipped gods according to Neukwalda's teachings.

After that, for some years Neukwalda preached in Dantos. She preached in Kados and Barostan, but the rulers drove her away from there as well. Neukwalda returned to Nathar and went to Guthmark and Margova, where the Dysanionist priests eventually decided to kill her.

Neukwalda was ordered to be burnt at the stake in the Margova market place. Neukwalda told her followers that she was going to die, but that she would return someday from Golos and would come to Nathar and preach. Then the rich would have to bow to the poor and the rulers would have to obey the common people.

The next day Neukwalda was burnt at the stake. She stood calmly while the flames ate her up. All she said was: "You can burn my body, but my words will live forever."

The stories tell that an unharmed Neukwalda had arisen from the ashes the following day. She had not said anything to anyone but had simply started walking to the north. When she came to the Mountain of Gods, Neukwalda had started to climb towards the gods and even now she is waiting there for the day she will return to Valenor.

The thousand faces of the gods

In the rituals, the priests and sometimes also other participants take for themselves one of the thousands of masks of the gods. At funerals, the priest can take the mask of the God of Death Golos, and at weddings the God of Love, Venita.

All masks are not directly connected with gods. One can also speak generally of the mask of the Wise Man, the Madman or the Warrior. Often these can also be connected to a god or a well-known legendary figure. The priests argue about whether all masks of gods belong to different gods, and whether one god can have more than one mask.

There are thousands of masks, but most of them are of minor importance. Important masks are much more rare and they are divided into three rings: Ring of Birth, Ring of Life and Ring of Death. Each has seven masks, but the Prophet in the Ring of Birth and the Madman in the Ring of Death represent the same things, the chance of a new life in death. The mask of the Prophet is sometimes also called the mask of Neukwalda.

Ring of Birth

The Prophet, Neukwalda (emptiness, unpredictability, hope, waiting, opportunity, winter)

Dugankis (lies, extravagance, pyras, evil)

Estia (fire, thought, dreams, priests, artists)

Lenos (innocence, childhood, love, purity)

Smith, Safanus, Waldior (making, forging, metals)

Fabius (joy, surprise, sociability, disorder)

Venita (birth, creativity, motherhood, cooperation, beginning, spring)

Ring of Life

Solonus, Dysanius (the Sun, time, continuity, eternity, light, summer)

The Warrior, Ersius (curiosity, perseverance, strength, youth, art of war)

The Merchant, Kuros (luck, chance, trading, money, change, humans)

Makhios (religion, gods, teaching, writing, morals, air)

Valius (Valenor, universe, Nathar, society, earth)

The King, Zangavius (order, law, power, security, maturity, responsibility)

Aurora (handicrafts, magic, learning, willpower, autumn colours)

Ring of Death

Golos (the Moon, death, destruction, end, polar night)

Aurelion (justice, truth, balance, inner peace, friendship, good elves)

Jan Mathus (water, loneliness, repentance, silence, darkness, silent ones)

Alderliss (judgement, killing, cruelty, repentance, evil elves)

The Storyteller, Minerva (arts, tales, inspiration, age, perfection)

The Hunter, Geros (hunting, achievement, running, wild beasts, orcs)

The Madman (emptiness, unpredictability, hope, waiting, opportunity, winter)

Wearing a mask

In rituals, the masks of gods are often used as real objects – all temples have the most important masks carved in wood, cast in metal, as face paints, or in some other form.

However, the mask doesn't have to be visible. Anyone at any time can obtain the mask of a god, and partly become that god temporarily. A smith can, at the moment of having a stroke of genius, put on the mask of Waldior, or a warrior can wear the mask of Ersius when he succeeds in his final, desperate blow.

Usually only the priests can consciously wear the mask of a god, but many ordinary people still try. Some believe that painting one's face to resemble the face of an animal may give the painted person the powers of that animal. Others may cry out the name of their god when trying to do something they feel

they cannot achieve on their own.

Organisation of the religion

Neukaism is not a particularly organised religion. Every Neukaist priest can convert others to the belief of Neukal, and all who convert can become priests by going to a temple. Most start out as priests in someone else's temple and then set up their own temple in their home region or some other place they find suitable.

Consecration into the religion takes place with the help of a priest. The priest chooses for himself a mask of his liking, usually that of Makhios or Estia. Then, he asks the person who is converting about his faith and ideas. If the candidate answers well, the priest gives him the mask of Neukwalda. The candidate then declares himself to be Neukaist, after which he is a convert and is consecrated as Neukaist.

If there are several priests in one temple, the founder or the leader of the temple can be called a high priest. Often the temple is also called his room or house. However, the priests usually work as equals so that the older priests help the younger priests, but have no authority over them. Different temples do not have an actual cooperation system, but the priests cooperate with each other as they wish.

In Neukaist temples, the priests contemplate the teachings of Neukwalda, copy writings, grow herbs, make wine, beer and medicinal drinks and medicate and treat the sick in the vicinity.

Neukwalda did not write down her teachings herself, but most temples have a copy of a book that is called the Word of Neukwalda. The book is a collection of sermons and myths of Neukwalda, as well as tales that are told about her, and each copy is different. The sermons and tales are collected on the basis of hearsay and each has different versions. In addition, the book has been copied by hand over the centuries, and every person who has copied it has changed it slightly with his own comments and even by adding or removing chapters. Because of this, Neukaism is not always very uniform, but on the other hand, it changes well along with the times.

Some Neukaist priests have wanted to make their religion more centrally led and to choose a successor to Neukwalda. This archbishop of Neukwalda would act in the same way as the dysan in Dysanionism, by deciding on the correct interpretations of the writings and by guiding the priests to work together. Many feel, however, that the selection of an archbishop would be an insult towards Neukwalda, who announced that she herself would return to Valenor.

TRANSITIONISM

Transitionism is a religion born in Eksos over hundreds of years, which teaches that the purpose of life is to work for the sake of other people. Valenor is the home of men and men should live there in peace and harmony.

Transitionists think that no man is better than the other. Decisions should not come down from kings or

priests, but every person has to make his own decisions. In the communities, decisions are made at mass meetings in market places or in the senate.

Similarly, as all men are equal, also no other beings are higher than men: not gods, not pyras, not elves, not orcs and not silent ones. Transitionists consider magicians, divine oracles, pyratongues and lightsouls to be manifestations of outside forces trying to control men, threats to men's freedom. This control is something that every person has to break free from by his own willpower. For example, magicians are not trained to be wizards, but instead they are expected to repress the magic powers in themselves by meditating and by using their inner force.

The symbol of Transitionism is a circle that represents balance, pierced by a vertical line.

History

Transitionism has developed gradually with the help of many philosophers and priests. Also the orcs of the South have had a strong influence on Transitionism, and Transitionists have learned a lot from them. Transitionists do in fact often have warmer relations with orcs than other humans.

Over two hundred years ago Transitionism had become the prevailing way of thinking in Eksos and had also gained some support among the rural populations of Miran and Sondar. At that time, Transitionists ousted the King of Eksos and founded a senate to rule the land. About a hundred years later the King of Nathar founded a senate to work under him.

Since then, Transitionism has not really spread. Here and there some men or orcs have changed their thinking in that direction, but no new mass movements have been born. On the other hand, in Eksos, Transitionism has gained a stronger foothold and many schools with slight distinctions have formed inside it.

Set of values

The Transitionists do not think that all diseases are caused by pyras and do not consider healers or nature spirits to be the only way to get rid of them. Therefore, medicine is more developed among the Transitionists than among other humans.

The Transitionists are always ready to question anything and to have long, philosophical discussions on principles, values or modes of action. Many think that the basic goal in life is to find some basic truth. Others feel that such thinking is superstition, because there is no final truth, only more questions. One must always be prepared to change one's views, if they do not correspond with reality.

A man is seen as part of nature and as its lord. Nature spirits, pyras, elves and silent ones, on the other hand, do not fit in this equation. Some think that orcs are also part of nature, others that they are estranged from it.

The Transitionists believe that humans have in them the potential for true greatness, if only they can break free from their fear of their imaginary superiors. Many parties have wanted to keep humans

insignificant, but if they are not afraid of the gods, there is no limit to what humans can achieve.

For the Transitionists, the things worth pursuing in life are pleasure, peace of mind and friendship. In a person they value honesty, responsibility, tolerance, attentiveness, compassion, enlightenment and the ability to cooperate. Everything is allowed as long as it does not hurt anyone else. They also strive to make every situation better for man and his pleasure. On the other hand, if things are bad, but nothing can be done, this should be taken calmly and take things as they are.

The Transitionists appreciate philosophy, art and natural sciences. Because they do not use magic or trust in other supernatural assistance, there has been more pressure on them to develop natural sciences and technology than on other humans. They have learned many things from the orcs. Some things that others do with magic, they do with science, but there are many things that they cannot do.

ACADEMY OF GAIDAVA

The Academy of Gaidava is the only institution that provides higher education in Nathar. Most of the important officials, doctors and priests have studied there, as well as some nobles and wizards. The faculty is open to both men and women, but they have separate classes in basic studies.

Practically anyone can be accepted to study in the Academy, but usually only twenty men and twenty women are accepted each year. Because there are more applicants, the noble, rich, locals and those with special talents are given preference over others. Many students in the academy have studied before in a gymnasium. Studying in the Academy is expensive, so if a common person applies, he must have a rich benefactor, usually the count who rules his village. Academy students are called undergraduates.

There are four faculties and eleven professor's chairs in the Academy: three in the Faculty of Supernatural Sciences, one in both the Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Medicine and six in the Faculty of Philosophy. The Faculty of Philosophy provides the basic education, after which many undergraduates continue studying in other faculties. The professors are responsible for the studies in the faculties, but there is also a dean in each faculty, who is in charge of the practical administration.

Every student accepted to the Academy has to master at least reading and writing as well as some arithmetic. Teaching in the Faculty of Philosophy is in Adlic, but after the basic studies everyone has been able to read and write also the Old Language and Elvish. For the first two years the students are divided into classes according to sex and year of entrance. In the third year, only the sex is essential, and from the fourth year on until graduation all students are in the same class.

The Faculty of Philosophy has six chairs: logic, ethics, rhetoric, linguistics, physics and mathematics. Logic studies include mainly philosophy of art and exact knowledge of poetic metre. Ethic studies include, in addition to the history of the Empire, also social sciences, law, political science and moral questions. Rhetoric studies include mainly studies in humanities, as they include art as well as philosophy of science. Linguistics includes studies in the Old Language and Elvish and the grammar of Adlic. In physics, the students concentrate on natural sciences, mechanics and alchemy. Mathematics, on the other hand, includes everything that could not be put anywhere else: geometry, algebra, architecture, astrology, geography, trade, and even music.

The Faculty of Supernatural Sciences has chairs in theology, thaumaturgy and metaphysics. Theology concentrates on studying gods, nature spirits and religions, and many students who graduate from the

department act as priests. Thaumaturgy, on the other hand, studies magic, wizards, silent ones, dragons and their relation to humans. The Department of Thaumaturgy is in close cooperation with the Highest Tower, although the students are not usually wizards. Metaphysics studies everything that ordinary men cannot control, whether it is magic, pyra powers, gods, dragons, elves or anything else. Metaphysics is mainly interested in the relations between these.

Studies in the Faculty of Law include former and current laws, relations between noble families, town planning, world politics and such like. The students who graduate from the Faculty of Law often work as lawyers, lagmen, judges, senators' assistants or other officials.

The Faculty of Medicine teaches alchemy, surgery, philosophy and botany. The students learn how to distinguish diseases caused by pyras and poisons from ordinary natural diseases, and study different worldly and mystical ways of healing them. Most students who graduate from the Faculty of Medicine work as doctors in the towns.

The most important governing body of the Academy, the consistory, consists of the professors, the rector and the chancellor. The rector is in charge of the Council while the chancellor manages the relations between the Academy and the imperial administration. Both the rector and the chancellor are usually former professors.

When an undergraduate graduates from the Faculty of Philosophy, he receives the title Master of Philosophy. The titles are given in promotion ceremonies, which are organised every three years. In these ceremonies, doctorates can also be awarded to those who have continued studying as Masters of Philosophy in some other faculty and are graduating from there as Doctors of Supernatural Sciences, Law or Medicine. Some nobles can also be appointed honorary doctors.

DANTOS

Dantos is the second largest human kingdom after Nathar. However, because of the stony, dry soil, Dantos is a rather poor and even dreary place compared to Miran, its neighbour in the west. The people of Dantos are mainly farmers, woodcutters and hunters, all of whom have a strong belief in Dyanionism. The land is in fact ruled with an iron fist by the Priest-King Sargus III Palthuïn.

Dantosians are by nature often determined, straightforward and eager to point out the flaws in other people. They are often melodramatic and arrogant, and suspicious of everything strange or unfamiliar.

Over the last two years, silent ones have occupied a large part of Dantos. Miran has entered into a defensive alliance with Malthos, the western province of Dantos, and Nathar has annexed the northern province of Ghedos "back" as its own grand duchy. The other two provinces, Shados and Tanthar, are completely under the rule of the silent ones, and the people of Dantos who have survived are either their slaves or have taken refuge in Nathar. In this chapter Dantos is presented as it was before the occupation by the silent ones.

History

In the beginning, the empire of Nathos consisted of three provinces: Thelar, Sondar and Ghedos. Ghedos was the most recent one of these, and when towns were built to the south of it, Ghedos traded extensively with them. The lands to the south of Ghedos were known as Dantos, named after the family of the Merchant Queen Dana III Dantoria of the town of Thegard.

Hundreds of years ago orcs and silent ones decided to unite their forces and attack the human towns in the Dantos area. The Empire of Nathos and the wizards of the Highest Tower helped the knights of the area. The knights fought against the orcs, and the wizards against the silent ones. Finally the fight exploded into a huge, magic war, as a result of which the fertile lands to the south of Dantos, where mainly orcs lived, turned into a magic wilderness – Plains of Dreams.

To defend themselves from the monsters, the city-states of the Dantos area had organised into small defensive alliances: Eastern Tanthar, Southeast Shados and Southwest Malthos. They were, in practice, allies of the province of Ghedos, and sought protection from the Empire of Nathos. The negotiations were concluded so that four new provinces were added to the administration district of Nathos: Tanthar, Shados, Malthos and Miran. Unceasing guarding of the southern borders began.

During the following prosperous generations, the Empire of Nathos further expanded to its full measure of thirteen provinces. Administration became more difficult and corruption increased. Tanthar, Malthos, Shados and Ghedos cooperated with each other rather than with the other provinces.

Although there was some trading with the silent ones, distrust of the orcs only increased. Elsewhere in Nathos, orcs could live despised but in peace, but in Dantos they were either criminals or slaves. People also started to fear the wizards: after all, the area was under constant pressure, situated as it was between the Highest Tower in the northeast, Miran in the west, Plains of Dreams in the south and silent ones in the southeast.

Perhaps in reaction to this, the area of Dantos became very religious and passionate priests had many listeners there. Also the rulers were often very devoted in their belief, and they sometimes persecuted magicians, Trodai warriors, Transitionists and later also Neukaists, and generally everyone they considered to be heretical. However, today the attitude towards wizards has become more stable, thanks to the cooperation with the Highest Tower.

The great attack of the pyras a few hundred years ago was in every way destructive for the Empire of Nathos, but perhaps ultimately good for Dantos. The battles were fought mainly in the north, in Thelar, Vakar, Gethar and Cruinne. When, as a result, Cruinne gained independence, this also strengthened the independence movement in the Dantos area. Following the example of the province of Shados, Malthos, Tanthar and Ghedos declared themselves the independent Dantos, as did also the provinces of Eksos, Miran and Gethar.

The others were able to achieve independence in a way along with Dantos, and the independent Dantos fought against its Nathosian rulers in many long and bloody battles. When the then Empress of Nathos, Hadadria the Oppressor died and her son Aldrion the Reformer ascended to power, things changed. Aldrion changed the Empire of Nathos into the Kingdom of Nathar, and promised Dantos independence in return for the province of Ghedos. This was agreed upon and the Princess of Shados, Maria Palthina, became the Queen of Dantos.

During the next century, Dantos became more united, and the royal family of Palthuïn made Dantos a strong, centrally led kingdom, where the ordinary people grew poorer and poorer, the nobles lived in prosperity and strong religious belief was common to all classes.

Certainly, Dysanionism and the simultaneous skirmishes on the borders with silent ones were, in fact, the main reasons for the nation's unity and the small number of peasant rebellions. Some peasants were inspired to rise against their masters by Neukaism that tried to spread from the east, but in towns this strange religion was repressed as fast as the risings in the countryside.

With the hope of getting back what belong to it, Dantos attacked Nathar with the intention of conquering the Priest Town of Sarkos, the Mountain of Gods and the province of Ghedos. The attack was repelled, but a part of Ghedos was attached to Dantos as its fourth province, South Ghedos.

After this, the relations between Dantos and Nathar calmed down, and Dantos accepted the position of "little brother". Today Nathar and Dantos are strong allies, and hold their own together against orcs, pyras and silent ones. Some think that Dantos is baldy dilapidated, but decent Dysanionists know to bow to their king and keep their mouths shut.

Society

Dantos is even more centrally controlled than Nathar. The rulers of the villages are the count, whose word is the law in worldly matters, and the priest, whose word is the law in spiritual matters. Above the counts, are the dukes and princes. The priests bow to the bishop in their duchy, and the bishops bow to the archbishops, who rule the cathedrals. Both archbishops and princes are under the direct command of the Priest-King. However, archbishops also obey the dysan, who rules the Dysanionists in the Nathar town of Sarkos.

The mere idea of freedom of religion is an insult to most Dantosians. Neukaists and Transitionists are especially unwanted visitors, and those who spread their teachings are sentenced to death. The Trodai are accepted, because they are seen only as a slightly peculiar branch of Dysanionism. Every priest controls, interprets and preaches the word of Dysanius in his own village. There are sometimes large differences between these interpretations, and then it is ultimately the duty of bishops and archbishops to make sure that orthodoxy is maintained. Heretical preachers can be executed if necessary.

The army of Dantos is nothing compared to that of Nathar. Each count is obligated to send three armed cavalymen to war. There is are no actual foot soldiers, but, if necessary, all Dantosians are ready to defend their home, king and religion with forks and axes.

Most wealthy townspeople and the noble have slaves. Skilled craftsmen and scholars are the best house slaves, and orcs make the best field slaves.

Orcs cannot become citizens of Dantos, but instead, all orcs are outlaws, unless they can name their owner. Orcs are in fact often considered to be thieves, rapists and imbeciles, which is why they are despised and loathed. Self-respecting parents would not allow a wild orc near their children. Some mercenaries specialise as orc hunters, who kill the wild orcs that get too close to human settlements.

In Dantos, divine oracles, healers, blood staunchers and seers are esteemed highly, and they are in fact

often leaders in their communities. Acting as a pyratongue is punished with death. The attitude towards magicians is the same as in Nathar, and the authority of the wizard inspectors of the Highest Tower also reaches Dantos. Wizards as such are often met with suspicion, and many Dyanionists feel that wizards are almost like priests of a strange religion.

Many important trade routes go across the land. Miran and Eksos provide a lot of fine products, as do also the silent ones of the southeast. Sometimes, a caravan of orc merchants arrives from the south, and their goods are usually transferred to human merchants and sold forward in Dantos or Nathar. The richest merchants live in a same kind of prosperity as priests and nobles. The most important export products of Dantos are wine, furs and cheeses.

The towns of Dantos are often more beautiful than those in Nathar. Dantos is in fact proud of its architecture and sculpture, and especially the temples and statues of the gods are unparalleled in the whole world. The most magnificent building is of course the palace temple of the Priest-King in Paldova.

Dantosian names are similar to those in Nathar.

Dantosians and difference

Strong religiousness combined with a fear of foreigners has made the Dantosians afraid of anything different. Orcs are only accepted as slaves, homosexual behaviour is highly disapproved, and wizards are considered frightening and strange.

Foreigners are seen as unreliable and shady creatures, who must not be let out of sight. Natharians are liberal clowns, Miranians are suspicious wizards, and Eksosians are weird atheists. Silent ones are considered suspicious, but still useful trade partners. Elves are mainly seen as a scary nuisance, but fortunately, most of them live far away in the east and only a few in Nathar.

Also other religions are usually seen as evil, and in the districts of many bishops they are completely illegal. Transitionism is a totally incomprehensible sect, which few, however, take seriously. Neukaism, on the other hand, is considered to be a real threat, which has spread alarmingly especially to the poor rural areas and the wilderness. Neukaists are usually considered dangerous lunatics, who believe a man to be the equal to the gods.

CHILDREN OF EARTH: ORCS IN NATHAR

Orcs of Nathar are mistreated and despised creatures. They usually become very attached to their home, whether it is a small cave in the wilderness or a small log cabin near a village. Orcs are not too proud or self-assertive, which is why they easily submit to being ordered around by others.

Orcs submit easily to accepting the prevailing circumstances, but if they are tormented too much, they may resort to a nearly animal rage. Orcs are in fact dangerous warriors, and they get along much better with the forest and the animals than humans.

Orcs have become fairly well adjusted to living on the outskirts of human societies. They are swineherds, who live a smelly reach away from the villages, or they are trackers, who know the forest, and who are called only in the case of an emergency. People do not usually let orcs into their towns, and in the countryside they are only accepted as maids and hired men, who are thrown out when the work is done.

And still, the orcs submit. They love their home, its rocks and trees, its lakes and rivers. They are ready to defend their home whatever it takes, but, on the other hand, to keep their homes they are also ready to leave them for work in the fields of men or to enlist in the army.

Then, an awful homesickness torments them the whole time they are away. An orc who has lost his home, may become insane or begin to wander about believing that he hears his new home calling somewhere.

A civilised orc is almost an impossibility, because no sane person would teach orcs to read or anything else. As a result, many orcs themselves believe that they are more stupid than men. In Nathar, orcs use human names.

Appearance

Orcs have a greyish-brown skin, a muzzle and fangs. Their hair colour varies from blond to red, and from brown to black. Typically, orcs of the north have grey skin and blond hair, but orcs of the south have less colourful skin and darker hair. Some orcs also have large or pointed ears.

Orcs like to wear fur and skins, and they sometimes decorate themselves with feathers or bones. In the south, orcs often wear hats, and many aim to imitate the way humans dress.

Usually, orcs are patient and gentle in nature, but when they start to hate something, they can stay angry for the rest of their lives. Orcs enjoy the company of animals and living in the forest, and they have many animal instincts. Many orcs have extremely good sense of smell, others hear or see better than humans.

Orcs are often very physical creatures, who enjoy exercise and doing things. In their free time, orcs may wrestle, climb trees or have running races. When they are hunting or at war, orcs enjoy the excitement of battle, and some even become thirsty for blood.

Orcs generally live approximately 40 years, but they stay strong right up to their death. Orcs celebrate their maturity when they are about ten years old. In the cold regions, when there is snow on the ground, orcs may hibernate in their cabins or a nearby cave.

Religion

Few orcs are particularly religious. Normally they worship the gods of their home region, like men who live close to them, but without enthusiasm. Like humans, orcs also hate and fear pyras, but they do not completely trust nature spirits either. Often orcs feel that the spirits near their home are threatening

troublemakers.

However, there is a story of the Father of Earth and the Mother of Time, which has passed from one orc generation to the next. According to the story, the Father of Earth has created Valenor, and the Mother of Time has planned everything that will happen. The first orcs were their children, and that is why orcs are sometimes called Children of Earth, or Sons or Daughters of Earth. Orcs consider these names very honourable, and therefore those who wish to be friends with orcs use them.

Orcs do not believe in courage or heroism, they simply do what has to be done. This is depicted by the Mother of Time, who has made precise life plans for every orc. The plans have been lost long ago, but many orcs believe that also to be part of the plan. Therefore, orcs can say that everything they do is a part of the plan of the Mother of Time, and therefore inevitable.

Because of this, orcs pay a lot of attention to how they feel when they do something: what they see, smell, feel, hear and taste while doing what the Mother of Time has decided they should do. Thus, they can, in a way, observe the constantly developing work of the Mother of Time, while also being part of it themselves.

The oldest of peoples

Orcs remember that they are the oldest people in Valenor, but if there were days of glory or prosperity in their past, they are long gone now, when men rule Nathar and the lands surrounding it.

Many believe that the engraved stone statues, glacial boulders and ornamented cavern vaults are the work of ancient orcs. Today, orcs do not master the art of stone cutting and can only guess what meaning those ancient monuments had for their ancestors.

Some orcs believe that they will someday find a Haven, where orcs can live as free and fully independent citizens. In that Haven, the ancient skills of the orcs will flourish, and orcs will be protected by the Mother of Time and the Father of Earth. Some orcs, who have been driven away from the home, search for the Haven in old caverns or from the depths of the Dark Forest, others beyond the Badlands of the north, and some in the Plains of Dreams or far in the east.

ELVES: LIVING ONES

Of all the beings of the worlds, elves were the First. They were born before plants, and before animals. They were born before silent ones and orcs, before pyras and gods. Into this world, they came as a part of the war between the Light and the Darkness.

In the beginning, was the Darkness, and the Darkness lasted forever. Then there was the first Light, which illuminated a part of the Darkness and gave it colours and shapes. And of that unity of the Light and the Darkness, were born the elves. Because elves are a people of the Light and the Darkness, they

see Light even there where there is none. Elves get their powers from the Light, they breath it, they eat it. Elves are of the Light.

Most elves are Living Ones. They are elves who live in the forests, in small villages and who celebrate, conjure, dance, sing, hunt, love and rejoice from day to day. Sometimes you also see Rememberers, dark elves, who wander in the lands of elves, silent ones, men and orcs, looking for something that is lost. Some Rememberers are dark elves or shadow elves, which serve the Darkness.

Living Ones are not interested in the disputes between the Light and the Darkness, they only care about the here and now.

Appearance

On the outside, elves appear tall, graceful, human-like creatures, with pointed ears. They are normally slender and beautiful, but still ethereal and unhuman-like. Their hair is usually long, and can be of any colour, for elves can decide for themselves, what coloured hair will grow on their heads. However, many elves that travel incognito, try to keep their hair brown or black. The earthly appearance of the elves is like a diluted version of their true, original appearance in the place that is the Light and the Darkness.

On the inside, elves differ a lot more from the residents of this world. Unlike the creatures in this world, elves do not have an actual soul on earth. Instead, elves are, as some people say, “light on the inside”. When elves die here, they die for good, and their inner light becomes part of the Light. To counterbalance this, elves age very slowly and do not die of old age or diseases.

Because elves are eternal and immortal, they are strongly attached to the present moment. They do not care about the past or the future; they do not remember their childhood or fear old age. They do not worry about tomorrow, and cannot necessarily separate days from each other. Old memories begin to seem like forgotten dreams, until they fade away forever.

Because of this, elves feel everything strongly and can be whatever they like. Each moment they fall in love and get angry, laugh and cry, and they do this whole-heartedly.

After living for thousands of years, some Living Ones may forget that the meaning of life is to live. They believe that their life is meaningless, and the passing of time starts to trouble them. Their will to live begins to fade, they may get depressed and worn, and they believe they have experienced everything worth experiencing. They leave their homes searching for death, or for a purpose in life. Some believe that they will become Rememberers. But, they are soon forgotten as a part of life’s background noise, and others will do not mourn for them.

Society

Elves see no need for money, laws, religion or other such things, although, occasionally, they have to become familiar with these, when they are involved with the earthly peoples. The common attitude

towards men, orcs, nature spirits, pyras and silent ones, is that elves, if anyone, should be objects of worship. “Oh, you poor man, we do not need other gods than ourselves!” Elf villages are not normally governed at all, although, a story tells that there is an elf kingdom in the eastern lands that is ruled by a king called Arel-d-Liss.

However, when elves get to know a member of another people better, their attitudes are soon forgotten, and they may not even remember anymore that they have not know the other creature forever. In fact, the aging of other creatures often comes as a shock and a surprise to elves.

Elves make love to whomever they want, unless the other party resists. Although elves are biologically men and women, this is not in any way visible in society: they merely behave differently with different creatures. If an elf gets pregnant, it will be a surprise to her at first, but soon it becomes a part of who she is, and when the child is born, she might even forget that she was ever pregnant.

Rarely does anyone remember, who is whose child, but instead, the whole community takes care of the young. If elves are in love, they can, of course, spend all their time with one elf (or even a man), but marriages or other forms of mating are not known – and neither are jealousy or envy. Even the most burning love is usually soon forgotten, or another, even more passionate, love affair, may be carried on at the same time.

Elves only harm others when it is necessary for achieving their goals, and hence, they have no regrets. Elves do not like to eat meat, because they feel that eating a living thing is disgusting. Sometimes, if an elf has lived among men for a long time, he might forget this and adopt the brutal custom that disgusts other elves. Deers are especially close to elves, and they punish deer hunters severely.

In the elf community, everything is common, and the wandering elves take what they need. Elves believe they know the essence of the world so well that they do not need religion or science to explain it to them.

Elf names are Elvish words, like for example Al-d-All (Living One of Dreams), Arel-de-Kry-s (Friend of Water), Ir-Lon-Y-s (Master of the Sword), Al-d-Riol (Eternal Living One), Arel-d-Liss (Friend of Death), Nib-de-Nes (Night of Hope) or Bal-d-Lyan (Child of the Sun). Men often change these into their own form, such as Waldal, Ardelis, Irlonius, Aldrion, Aldris, Nibennes or Bwaldion.

Home areas of elves

The world that is Earth is in Elvish Ai-le-Nour, which means “Land, where the Light and the Darkness are present”. Men use the same term (in the form “Valenor”), although, they think that it means “Land of the Light”.

There are several continents in Ai-le-Nour, but only one of them is inhabited by intelligent peoples. This continent is called Almon – in Elvish Alme-On, Battle Field. Men live in the western part of Almon, orcs in the south, and silent ones in the west.

To the west of Almon, there is an island, where in ancient times lived many orcs and some Magical Creatures, and to which most of the elves retired when men arrived. They call it Kry-Nour (Cruinne in human language), which means “Land in the Middle of Water”.

There are also some home areas of the Elves in the continent of Almon. Far away in the east, on the other side of the regions of the silent ones, there is the Land of Eternal Life (Nour-d-Ale-Riol), which has many elf villages, towns and even states. There is also the Tower of the Light (Mol-d-Ai), which is one of the last forts of the Light that were built on Earth for the War of the Worlds. Some say that the Highest Tower of human wizards (Mol-Nos) would be of the same origin, but this has not been proved. In any case, Mol-Nos has existed before men. Similar forts and towers of the Light (and perhaps also the Darkness) are also said to exist elsewhere in Almon, but there is not much knowledge of them.

The Plains of Dreams (Nour-d-On) in Almon is an area that separates the home areas of men and orcs from one another. Various kinds of monsters live there, and the world of Magic is strongly represented, due to the magical catastrophe that happened centuries ago. The Darkness resides in the Plains of Dreams and in the Haunted Mountains on their westside.

SILENT ONES

Silent ones may look like a cross between a lizard and a human, but they are pure magic on the inside. They are merchants, wizards, artists and warriors, who are all part of something greater and united, which they only feel as pleasure or pain, principles or desires that they receive from somewhere Above.

Appearance

Silent ones have a pale, but colourful, slightly hairy and often spotted skin, a long bill and a thick, lizard-like tail that hangs down to the ground and helps to balance their walk. Normal silent ones are from 5 to 6½ foot tall, but emperor silent ones can be twice as big. Silent ones live to be several hundred years old. They usually wear clothes made of black leather.

The most remarkable feature of the silent ones are the red, glowing sight lumps above their eyes, which help them to see in the dark. At night, the only thing that is visible is often these red “eyes”, glowing in the dark.

Silent ones do not have vocal cords, but they are strongly connected to each other. They normally move in groups of five or six, sort of collectively. When the group stays together, it has fairly strong magical powers, individuals can keep up the strength of the group by incanting spells, in other words, by resonating in their throats a sound between mumbling and humming.

When the silent ones touch each other, they have a magic connection. In this way, they can heal from their wounds and exchange thoughts without using words.

Society

Society of the silent ones is divided into three castes. Emperor silent ones are of the highest cast, they are the rulers and the most magic silent ones. Beneath them are wizard silent ones, who are nobles, merchants, artists – and wizards. The lowest caste in society are warrior silent ones, whose job it is to protect the wizards and the emperors and go to war against the enemies of the silent ones – at the moment, humans.

All silent ones receive their orders from Above. Not from the wizards or the emperors, but from somewhere higher, perhaps from Magic itself. Orders are obeyed without question, since orders are a part of being a silent one. It is not really thought about, orders are actually desires, and the inner will to act according to them.

The lands of the silent ones are to the south of the Sea of Shadows and to the east of the Plains of Dreams. Of the human states, only Dantos has a common border with silent ones. Normally, the wizard silent ones deal with foreign peoples. In the trading towns of the Sea of Shadows, they meet men, in the far east they meet elves, and in the west, orcs. Wizard silent ones have a large tail that gives them magic power and balances their crooked walk. Wizard silent ones live for hundreds of years.

Emperors live deep inside the lands of the silent ones, where no outsider can see them. They are from over 6 ½ to 10 feet tall, giant silent ones, who may eat other silent ones or suck magic from them by magic means. When they travel, the emperors can grow wings or ride dragons. The emperor silent ones do not apparently die of old age, but some of them have in olden times fallen in wars.

Mainly warrior silent ones take part in military campaigns. Their tails are traditionally docked as children, after which they spend dozens of years in training, where they learn to use different bardiches, sabres, knives and bows. It is believed, that they are also trained at this time to move better and more agilely than they would have with a tail. Usually, a war campaign is commanded by an emperor silent one, and each group of warriors is led by a wizard silent one.

The silent ones do not call each other by actual names, since they communicate with the power of thought. They do, however, have mental images of each other, by which individual silent ones can be recognised. Because the players of the silent ones do not necessarily know telepathy, they can use mental image names, such as One Eye, Red Dot, Grumpy, Long Whiskers, Bow Bearer, Shorty, Stone-coloured or Human Hater.

History

The silent ones were born into the world of Valenor in a time before men, at the same time that elves and pyras walked in the lands of Valenor for the first time. Before that, the souls of the silent ones are

said to have lived in the Rainy Islands, outside this world, from which they had to leave, and to which they cannot return before the end of the world.

Silent ones have lived in the continent of Almon for a long time, and their life together with elves and orcs has mainly been peaceful. There was a time when silent ones were seen all over the continent, but when men arrived, they were directed to retire to the south parts of Almon.

In the south, silent ones came into contact with war-like orc tribes and states. The border skirmishes and forays sometimes grew into small wars, but slowly the trade relationships developed, and finally silent ones and orcs joined forces for the war against men.

Hundreds of years ago, silent ones and orcs attacked the Empire of Nathar in the north. Battles were fought mainly in the area of present-day Dantos and the meadows and woodlands to the south of it. Finally, the battle culminated in a huge encounter between silent ones and human elves, and, as a result, the lands changed into a magic wilderness that is today called the Plains of Dreams. Many home areas of orcs were also destroyed, and they moved further to southwest, and maybe even today bear a grudge against silent ones.

Since then, that area has been divided with silent ones to the east, and orcs to the west. For centuries silent ones lived in peace trading occasionally with elves, men or even orcs.

Now, silent ones have had an order from Above: all men must be destroyed. Therefore, silent ones have declared war on the mankind. The will to destroy all men lies in every silent one. This does not mean that when a silent one meets a man, he instantly wants to kill him. No, silent ones aspire to a final victory with as few losses as possible, and to achieve that, some men may have to be left alive for longer than others.

Because men divide their areas into kingdoms, it has been decided to destroy them one at a time. Recently, the Kingdom of Dantos was destroyed, and a great number of human warriors were killed. Now, the number of silent ones has increased on the borders of Nathar and Miran, with the intention to attack Nathar next. However, first they have to get as much information as possible about the internal situation of Nathar, so that a strategy can be planned. Because of this, small groups of silent ones sometimes move across the border to watch the army of Nathar and the people's will to fight, and to spread a paralyzing fear into human hearts.

PYRAS

Beneath Valenor there is the fiery Abyss, where pyras live. The whole being of the Abyss pulsates with cruelty, violence, killing and pain. Thousands of diseases and curses trouble each inhabitant of the Abyss every day, and there is only one way out: to entice many others to take your place.

Pyras are not living creatures in the same way as animals, humans or orcs. They are made of flesh and blood, but can change body parts with others if they wish. The power that holds them together is the energy of the Abyss – pyra power.

Pyras travel over Valenor either on some mission for larger pyras or human elves, or in search of weaker beings, from whom they could steal or cheat body parts or gifts. Pyras cannot be killed, but their bodies can be decomposed, at which time their will and pyra powers are usually reborn in the Abyss or in a nearby cavity which leads to the Abyss and where pyra powers are strong. However, pyras need free flesh to be reborn, which is why they often travel in groups, where the other pyras can drag the decomposed body to be reborn, after first stealing pieces of it for themselves.

Rivers, lakes and seas are problematic for pyras, because over water they are not in touch with their pyra powers. They can leap over small brooks quite safely, but you hardly ever see them at sea. They rather travel through hollows under a river, than cross it on a raft. There are pyras on some islands, but they are captives there, and wise sailors know to avoid them.

Men can also get pyra powers. Sometimes pyras recruit these men known as pyratongues to help them, sometimes treat them as any other men. Pyratongues can, however, have the power to command weak-minded pyras, so you should be careful with them.

Although pyras do not like anyone, not even each other, they have most hatred for nature spirits that are sometimes seen in Valenor. Any pyra is at any time ready to fight for his life against a nature spirit.

Areas of the Abyss

The most important places in the Abyss are the caves, lit by stinking eternal fires, and pyra towns which are situated in them, but there is also some open air. There the sky is flaming in an eternal fire, and hot wind dries the skin. Here and there in the caves, flow rivers of blood that empty their red waters into the Sea of Gore, in the centre of the Abyss.

The Abyss is ruled by the Pyra King Dugankis. Dugankis is a giant, with a golden-red skin, black eyes and a fiery breath. He has huge dragon wings and immeasurable pyra powers. Dugankis lives in the massive Castle of Eyes, which is built of the skulls of orcs and men.

Tunnels and cavities lead from the Abyss to the world above, and many of these end up under ordinary hills or rocks. Men and orcs keep obstructing the holes, and pyras have to dig themselves a way to the outside world. The best passages are ancient orc-made cavern vaults, which are dug deep inside the rock, and which pyras have taken over from below.

From lisk to lord pyra

The ground of the Abyss not only looks red as flesh in the light of fire, it is flesh. The rotting flesh of sick and dying humans, and growing flesh of small, powerless pyras. From this bloody mound of flesh, sometimes small lisks are born, pyras about the size of a palm. Lisks grow by eating each other, by serving those above them and by stealing better body parts for themselves from animals, each other or from the mound of flesh.

When lisks begin to comprehend the world and learn to speak, they are called vicious pyras. Vicious pyras may climb up the tunnels to Valenor, or try to get power inside the Abyss. They often move in groups, and besides stealing body parts, they may also trade for them. Give me your voice and you may live forever. Give me your eyes, and everything you touch will turn to gold. Give me your soul, and I shall fulfil your every wish. However, few vicious pyras have the power to fulfil such promises.

Pyras can grow to look like almost anything, depending on what powers and parts they can get. However, regardless of their size, most pyras have red or reddish skin and horns. Keres are larger than vicious pyras, and can be devils the size of a man. From keres, pyras can grow to be ghouls, lemmos, croaks or some more original forms, depending on their nature and opportunities. Some may have spider legs or even several different heads.

The largest pyras are called lord pyras, and they often command massive pyra armies, where keres and lemmos fight against each other or against the inhabitants of Valenor. Lord pyras are huge, fiery red, bundles of muscles, and full of horns, thorns, wings, teeth and claws. All lord pyras have at one time been miserable lisks, and they know that to show any weakness could mean that they end up that way again.

Above lord pyras, there are a few pyra princes, the most important of which is Draiocht, the general of Dugankis. Draiocht is a completely red, horned enticer, who often travels in the outside world in the form of a human wizard. He is very interested in the outside world and often plans ways in which he could control the whole world. That would increase his power, and he could probably displace Dugankis himself.

Another respected pyra prince is Riunas, who is the master of diseases and plagues. For a pyra, Riunas has many worshippers among men, and many pyratongues are his followers. Even other pyras consider Riunas to be an unpleasant scumbag, and often conspire against him.

Pyras have names like Quarrel, Plague, Stink, Viper, Chicken Leg, Disgust, Gross, Shit Head, Snot, Cancer. Some lord pyras or pyra princes can also achieve such high esteem among men that they can use a human name.

NATURE SPIRITS

Each swamp and forest has its own guardian spirit, and under that spirit are numerous smaller spirits of animals, tress, ponds and rocks. Most spirits are shadowesses, who have human form and are only half corporal. Spirits can move as they wish, but most never leave their homes.

Above the spirits are the gods, who also each have their own sphere of influence. Forest spirits can be subordinates of Geros, wind spirits of Makhios, and so on. Some believe, in fact, that there was a time when the gods were ordinary nature spirits, and their power in their own sphere of influence has grown to be greater than anyone else's.

The spirits are feeling, intelligent beings. However, they may spend hundreds or thousands of years in just one swamp pond, which often makes their characters rather peculiar. Many spirits think the same thoughts for centuries, which is why they learn to see the world only through one view or emotion. A spirit can experience everything through hate, fear, love or pride, or be incapable of speaking the truth or understanding change.

Men often worship nature spirits, or at least try not to make them angry. In return, the spirits may award a man with hunting luck, good weather or by helping them in need. The spirits do not really care about orcs, elves and silent ones, but they hate and dread pyras instinctively.

Different kinds of spirits

Most nature spirits are seen in the form of a human woman or girl. This applies especially to shadowesses of the low lands, and to the momentesses of the mountains. If they wish, the shadowesses can, however, take on the form of a man, since there is nothing particularly feminine in them.

Flamings are spirits of fire and the sun, and they often appear in the form of a young boy. The boy's skin, hair or clothes are often orange or red. Flamings are more often messengers on their way from one spirit to another, than nature spirits tied to a certain location. However, they can spend long periods in volcanos, near a dragon's cave or in forest-fire areas. Flamings are usually servants of Solonus, Estia, Kuros or Aurora.

Spirits living in plants, animals, rocks and waters are usually shadowesses. They normally spend most of their lives in small ponds, dead trees, in glacial boulders or nearby, and may be very simple in their ideas. When they appear in human form, they often look like women, who somehow resemble their domicile in their colour, clothing or their mere appearance. The shadowesses will not often speak with humans. They are usually subordinates of Makhios, Venita, Jan Mathus or the God of the Forest, Geros.

Momentesses are the warriors among the spirits. They are always corporal, and look like beautiful women with the wings of a bat. They live in deserted uplands, and howl most terribly. Momentesses are fanatically dedicated to one thing at a time, and nothing will stop them completing their task. In their home mountains, they fight bloody battles against croaks and griffins, when defending birds and other animals from them. The momentesses serve Golos, Makhios and Safanus.

When nature spirit falls in love, love is unconditional, insuperable, amazing. Love for a mortal man is doomed, for when the man dies, the spirit is left alone, and is usually consumed by never-ending grief. Then they turn into grey women or men. Grieving, grey spirits dress in light grey, and spend their time crying and singing near the region where their loved ones died. Then, they come under the subordination of Venita, Lenos or Golos.

Also some animals are close to nature spirits, especially bears and ravens. The spirits like to spend time with these animals, and may adopt their form.

Nevertheless, shadowesses are closest to men. They enjoy living in the same areas with men, and they are the ones that men worship the most. The shadowesses are able to speak with men, and divine oracles often call for them. Shadowesses have names such as: Jay's Damsel, Lake Lass, Green Fransiska, Windess, Forest's Wife, Bark Virgin, Old Woman Rock, Mean Woman of the Dead Tree, Lightess, Blue Fairy, Girl Beneath the Ice or Sapess.