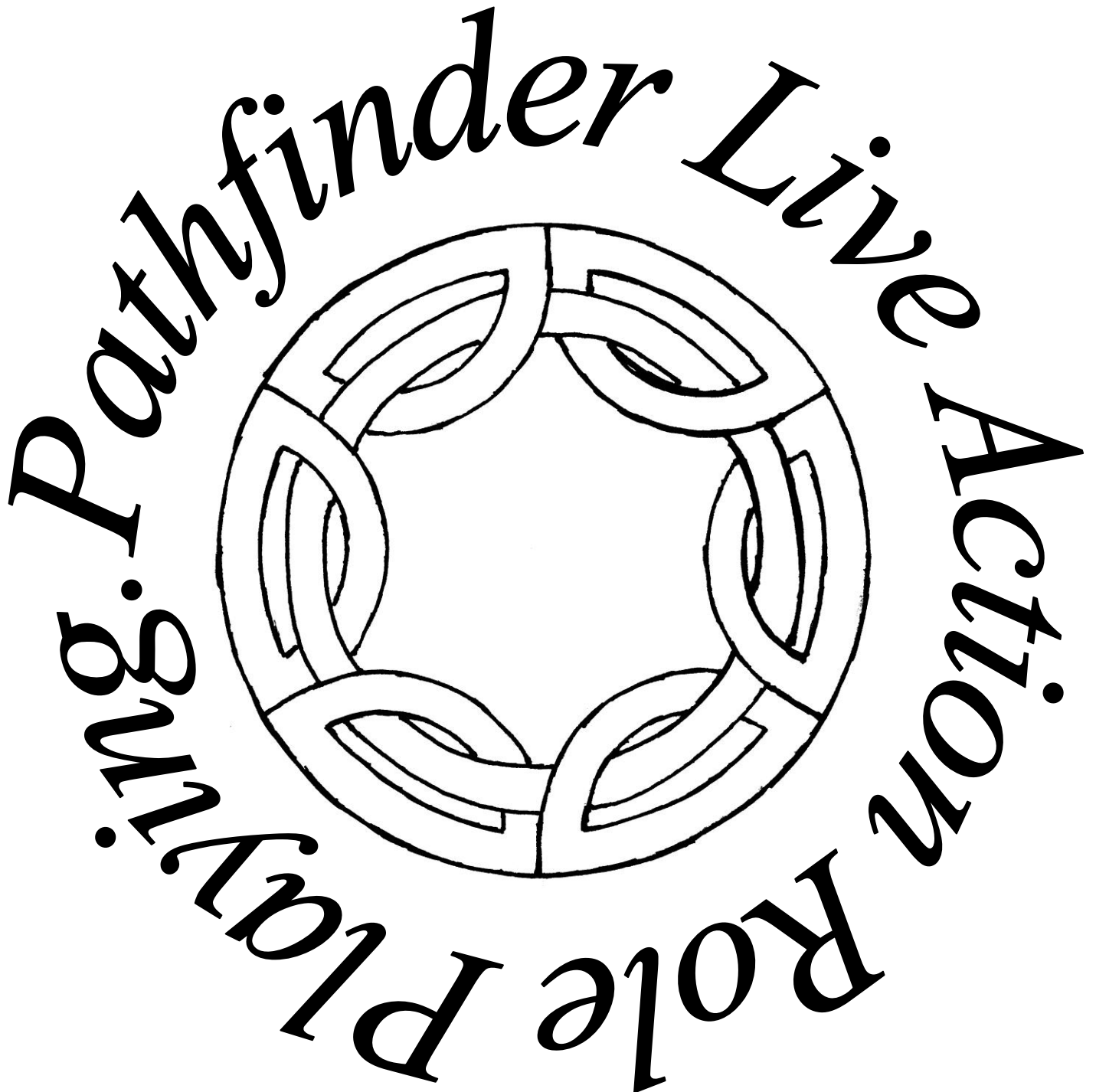


2013



The Churches of Vara

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IMPORTANT!

The information in this document should NOT be considered known in full by all characters. Details of specific guilds and groups should be limited in the most part to Characters who are members or those with a high 'Lore' skill. When in doubt always check with a Ref.

Good examples include the existence of the Incanters Guild or the history and weapons of the Bounty Dogs.

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Now bugger off and have fun, that's what it's about after all!

THE CHURCHES OF VARA

The inhabitants of Vara live under a pantheon of eight deities; if they chose not to follow one god in particular then all of the gods have roles in their lives. Osrose watches over their births, Neroz welcomes them at their deaths and each of the others play their part. But if one dedicates oneself to a particular god, then on death you go to the realm of that deity. For followers of Bronwen this is a Valhalla like afterlife, while for Lanokash it is a place of light and understanding. Each of the churches have their own celebrations and structure; each has its own tenets of behaviour and Paladinic order.

The Family of the Gods

As discovered recently in ancient scrolls (which tell of the birth of Vara and of the creation of the various entities which exist there), the Gods form a family unit of four elder gods and the four 'Divine Sisters'. Neroz, Osrose, Shashay and Lanokash are the four elder deities, created when the Great Good split itself into five parts so as to better combat the Great Evil. In turn, they paired off and bore four younger deities. From Osrose and Shashay came Ash'i'el, from Osrose and Lanokash came Starsha, from Neroz and Lanokash came Bronwen and from Neroz and Shashay came Liren, who would become the Crone.

Paladinic Orders

The Paladinic orders are the Holy knights of the church; filled from the ranks of both the militant priests and devout warriors, it is a calling that brings danger and sacrifice. To be a paladin one must follow the code of Chivalry just as a Knight must, but also one must resolve that with the code and ethics of the church; not always an easy thing. A paladin is in some respects a fanatic, unbending in belief and attitude. But they are also heroes of their faith, willingly sacrificing their lives to protect the followers and beliefs of their church.

Osrose, God of Life

Osrose rules the area of creation; couples go to his temples in hopes of being blessed with children. His power is a primal one, and his priests loathe all forms of undeath and needless waste of life. But they are just as willing as a forester to kill off the threat to the whole. Let the killer beware of the wrath of Osrose. Temples of Osrose tend to have beautiful ornamental gardens and well-stocked fish pools and orchards; truly they enjoy the bounty of life.

Followers of Osrose MUST carry a depiction of a flame, either embroidered on their tunics or as a piece of jewellery.

Basic Belief System

Priests of Osrose believe mainly in the sanctity of life in its many forms, order, and the creation of new life. The end of life is not their realm but that of Neroz. The many temples are places of beauty and tranquillity. Contrary to what might be perceived by some it is the priests of Osrose, not Starsha, that serve as midwives, for the birth of new life is a sacred event to them. They especially believe in the sanctity of marriage and greatly encourage it. This lands them in good stead with the common people of Vara. Osrose also serves as the God of Creation to the Dwarves. They see his role more in the forge and they often seek his blessing, especially when producing excellent metalwork or their famous Dwarven jewellery. They also abhor anything contrary to life, such as the Undead, and will seek to destroy it if possible.

Day to day celebrations

The sanctity of marriage is important to the church of Osrose, and it is to them that most people go for their weddings. These ceremonies are often grand with the priest officiating dressed in robes depicting the flames of life, and with braziers burning. The couple are blessed with a flame taken from the main temple nearest to them, and often the ceremony ends with a blessing of the fertility of the couple, sometimes whether they want it or not.

The Ceremony of Marriage

The Priest and generally two acolytes perform the ceremony; the couple and the priest stand in front of a large fire, with a stand for a torch by the side of the priest.

It is the acolyte's job to light the ceremonial fire and to dress the priest in his ceremonial robe, which for this instance tend to be white silk with flames embroidered from the bottom upwards.

They will stand so the couple faces the fire, and the priest will address those gathered.

"In the name of Osrose, we have gathered here to witness the union of this man and this woman so that they may go forth and be fruitful, and that they may live long lives together."

The priest will then stand to the side (so that he and the crowd may see the fire) and address the couple.

"Life is sacred to Osrose, and the union of marriage is only the starting point in the creation of new life; for the couple themselves as they embark upon a new life together, and for the creation of new life which they will someday bring forth into the world."

At this point one of the acolytes will take up a torch and light it from the fire, then hand it to the priest. As the priest speaks the next part, he will tilt the torch first to the man and then to the woman, to bless them with the holy fire.

"I ask in the name of Osrose that these people be blessed; that they have the chance to live their lives untroubled by hardship and illness, and that they be blessed in abundance with life. I ask that they may have peace at all times, and that they may find joy in their new lives and in their new family."

The torch is then placed in its stand.

"Before the union may be entered into, I must ask if there are any present here, who, for whatever reason, believe that these two people may not, or should not, enter into this union and bring forth life. I ask you in the name of Osrose to speak forth and state your reasons, else after this union is binding and can be undone by none."

"(Man), do you accept this woman as the one with whom you wish to bring forth life, do you swear to do your duty to her, to live by her side through all that you may face and to protect her life with your own?"

(woman) do you accept this man as the one with whom you wish to bring forth life, do you swear to do your duty to him, to live by his side through all that you may face and to protect his life with your own?"

"In the name of Osrose I ask that you, as those who are closest to the couple, promise to shelter them in times of need, and rejoice with them in times of joy.

And I ask Osrose to bless this marriage, that the fire of love and life may burn bright throughout it."

"The pair of you will now exchange rings and vows, and so will be bound by the law of Vara and in the eyes of Osrose."

"I (man) take (woman) to be my wife and to be the mother of my children. I take her to the place of my dwelling that it may become a place of creation. I take her in that the darkest days may be brightened by the flame. I take her in that no harm may come to her. I give her this ring to represent the cycle of life that will continue through us."

"I (woman) take (man) to be my husband and to be the father of my children. I go willingly into the place of his dwelling to make it ours and that it may be a place of creation. I go with him that the darkest days may be brightened by flame. I shelter him that no harm may come to him. I give him this ring to represent the cycle of life that will continue through us."

(Should the couple desire it, the priest will then make some inspirational reading; this can be skipped if neither the bride or groom are followers of Osrose.)

"It is within me to bless this marriage once, and finally, in the name of Osrose; may there be warming fires in your hearts at all times, and may your lives be bountiful. Osrose, may you grant your bounty to (woman) and (man), that it may bring forth new life. You are now man and wife."

(This last section may involve the Touch of Fertility spell, generally only done if the couple specifically ask for it.)

Temple Placements

Temples to Osrose are not all grand structures of marble with fantastic gardens and fish pools, but the larger ones are. Smaller shrines are often places of quiet retreat and for people to pray for fertility and seek the blessing of the god that they may make new life. Farmers also pray to Osrose for bountiful lambing seasons at these shrines. Even in the busiest cities temples look like places of life and creation amidst the hustle and bustle of city life.

The main Dwarven temple to Osrose is found in Gralamire, while the rest of the church has no main temple. Rather there is a series of equally important temples, one in each capital. Most major cities will have a large temple.

The Initiation Structure

The church is organised as follows:

- Acolyte.** They are trained in the ways of Osrose for up to a year to determine if their heart really belongs with Osrose.
- Novice priest.** Work as assistants to priests at the temples for a while learning the basic rites before making a pilgrimage to the main temple.
- Priest.** The priests see to the day-to-day running of the temples and the tending to shrines on their travels.
- Grounds Master.** This title is conferred to the head priest of a temple who is given the honour of tending the temples most prestigious gardens, and growing new layouts.
- The Circle of Life.** There are 6 that sit on the Circle of Life; they are the advisory council to the head of the church, and there is always at least one Dwarven member to represent their sect of the Church.
- The Holy Mother.** The Matriarch of the Church of Osrose represents the ability to give birth to new life, for indeed one cannot become the Holy Mother unless she is or has been a mother herself.
- The Avatar** The Avatar has no official role in the Church priesthood but instead usually
- “Saint of the Light”.** oversees the Paladinhood, usually a man to balance against the Holy Mother.
- Artefact of Osrose, “Staff of the Light bringer”** The staff contains both healing and weapon powers. As with other artefacts, it is Indestructible, calls to hand at will and it is magical at the 10th level of art

Yearly Celebrations

The Festival of Life

The Festival of Life is held in the spring; to the priests of Osrose this is the true beginning of a new year, as new growth blooms on the trees and the young of animals are born. It is a holy time to bask in spring sunshine and the new life brought with it.

It is more of an impromptu ceremony held all over Vara once the weather has turned from winter. It is also a highly auspicious time for new couples to get married and the priests of Osrose are only too happy to perform the ceremony.

Sub-sects of the Church

The Dwarves have a different structure all of their own.

‘The Acolytes of Life’ these are a fanatical sub-sect that only wishes to see the destruction of all Undead; while the Church agrees with that statement they cannot openly condone this group’s attacks against the church of Neroz and necromancers belonging to the Fellowship of Hermes.

Paladinic Order

"The Warriors of Life"

This is the Paladinic order of Osrose. They are not a large order, as it is difficult to convince a Paladin to take a squire, but persistence and dedication is usually rewarded. They protect life in all situations and hunt down and destroy undead.

However they will not specifically

undertake a mission to fight a living foe.

They will only defend a community as long as they remain, and they are usually avid travellers, seeking out Undead wherever they lurk. For this reason they are not too popular with common people, unless they are plagued by evil Undead.

The Warriors of Life

Benefits

Negation sphere free

Turn Zombie 3/ad

Turn Skeleton 1/ad

+1 level of art Negation sphere

+5 points of art

Title (Sir/Lady Knight) 300G/ad

Mighty blow 4/ad

2/2 life gain

Requirements

*Enhanced Mastery in main weapon
(usually mace or hammer)*

Possess faith sphere

*Complete holy quest to obtain Paladin-
hood*

*Adhere to Code of Chivalry and Church
Ethos*

Their Structure of Ethics

All life is sacred.

Life must be protected and nurtured.

Life may only be taken to preserve others.

Order above chaotic creation.

Neroz, God of the Dead

Priests of Neroz view the world in a strange way; they respect the dead and death itself. They are the ones who perform the funeral rites and protect the bone yards from disturbance. Some of them wish only to ensure that the dead remain undisturbed and raise them only in the direst of emergency. Others see the dead as being the true population on Vara and seek to help them destroy the living in the hope that they too may be allowed to return as one of the Undead.

Followers of Neroz **MUST** display a skull motif on their person.

Basic Belief System

The principles and ethics of the priests of Neroz may at first seem peculiar or possibly even derogatory in comparison to the other churches spread throughout Vara, yet the church has a purpose all its own.

The priest of Neroz is the last rites priest. He is the one who performs the ceremonies of the dead, the sealing of the coffin and the blessing of the body in its last stages from this life to the next. The priests have a great respect for the dead and there are some who take this to greater levels than others, for example, one priest may revere the dead and see that they are put to rest in the bone yard, another may have taken the job to watch over the bone yard to make sure none of the bodies are disturbed during their sleep by rogue necromancers and others still may think that the undead are the supreme race and the true masters of this earth.

These are the beliefs of the priest: Respect for the dead, protect the bone yard, and summon the dead with their permission and only if it is in the direst of emergencies.

With the cleansing of Liren, Neroz's church has become more about the dead and the undead than it once was. No longer does Neroz have to ensure that the dead reach their rightful place, for his daughter and his daughter's priests who now perform this task. The priests of Neroz are still the ones who seal away the tombs, but they are no longer the ones who speak the words over those about to pass on.

Temple Placements

Most villages have a small temple or shrine dedicated to Neroz, commonly found in the entrance to the bone yard; however some of the larger towns and cities have massive sprawling temples of the death god. Usually these are made from black stone and having several enchantments upon them, so that no undead creature may leave the place unless the wards are broken. In the case of cities the temple usually has the bone yard underneath it or the temple is near the edge of town for convenience.

The interior radiates extreme peace, and silence is dutifully kept throughout so the only sounds heard are the prayers of the priests as they perform the bone rites or the soft clod, clod, clod of boots on flagstones.

The main temple for the entire church is in Erinan.

The Initiation Structure

The levels of power in the church are as follows:

Neophyte. After one year's training or sponsorship from another priest they are kept in the temple for induction, training and such.

Fledgling priest. Made to report to the sponsor or church for the first month of induction, performs basic bone rites. They are usually sent around Vara to administer the word to travellers and such.

Full priest. The progressed holy man of Neroz, these are the ones who usually administer the temples and shrines or travel Vara looking for initiates or rogue necromancers.

Yard watchers. The ones who have achieved enough deeds to be thought responsible to watch over a major yard.

Guardians of the Dead. There are six of these and they are the supreme ruling council. Little more is known other than that they reside in the supreme temple in Erinan and are chosen by Neroz himself.

The Avatar
"The Speaker to Spirits". Emissary to Neroz, it is said that everything he says has been uttered first by the Lord of the Dead and he is the direct gateway to Neroz. He is chosen by Neroz and must perform the rite annually.

Artefact of Neroz "Ring of Bones", the ring has powers of Harm and can raise Undead as well as summon spirits, as with all Artefacts it is Indestructible, calls to hand at will and is magical at the 10th level of Art.

Yearly celebrations

Thinveil

Thinveil is the New Year ceremony usually ascribed to three major aspects. These are the giving of respect to those who have passed before, the time when the enchantments upon the bone yards and the long barrows must be renewed and strengthened, and most importantly it is the time when acts such as the raising of spirits or speaking with loved ones long past in the grave is more approachable. The rite is usually begun around dawn on the New Year's day and it is traditional for families to send wreaths of flaming pine branches specially prepared along rivers signifying their hope that their loved one's soul will either travel to the afterlife safely or remain there and is a showing of the families love.

However the church's festivities are much different. It begins at midnight the day before and on the day of the New Year the high priest intones the wisdom of Neroz and acts as a channel for his power. Other priests across the kingdoms will go into a trance so as to be able to listen to the words and store them permanently. This may go on for up to three and a half hours at a time and all must stay within this form of trance. Then the sacrifices begin. At the high temples four randomly chosen animals are slain at the high altar. Their carcasses are cooked and eaten in a grand feast, which is begun by the term 'this animal in life was bred for death so now we shall feast upon its demise so that its life has not been in vain.' With this the feast is begun; if travelling the same is done with a side of meat or freshly hunted beast.

Yet there is a sinister side to the festivities for a cult within the church that calls itself the 'Bringers of Death' chooses this time of year when the seals on graves are at their weakest to raise undead and cause destruction.

Balemort

This is a Church celebration that occurs each year on the 31st of Octander, the rite of the 'Death of Fire' is enacted, and the Avatar and six others proceed through the graveyard holding torches at the toll of midnight. The Avatar stands forth and enacts the rite of 'Balemort' in which the power of the Avatar may be transferred to another. If Neroz deems another is better suited the power is passed, if not it remains with the current holder. As soon as the rite is complete they throw their torches upon a bonfire and a lavish feast is laid out for all at the temple to celebrate the Choosing of an Avatar for the coming year.

Sub sects within the church

"The Order of the Death-Watch" the Order was founded in the year 1329 by the Blessed Ardval of Calsmeer, a venerable priest of Neroz. St. Ardval spent most of his life as a priest, travelling the realm and spreading the word of the Faith. However, as age caught up with him he resolved to return to his home town and take charge of the local bone-yard where he could enjoy a peaceful semi-retirement. Once there however, he discovered that his beloved sister was afflicted with a wasting disease of the bones which proved resilient to the magic of the local healer. St. Ardval felt the hand of Neroz at work calling him to a new path, and so he turned his family's farm into a hospice for the incurably ill or insane allowing them to die with dignity, free from pain or suffering. Over the years that followed, many priests called to the faith came to St. Ardval for training before spreading throughout the realms of Vara, where they established their own hospices to comfort the dying and the recently bereaved. St. Ardval himself died at a patient's bedside having reached the great age of 83 years and was buried in the grounds of his farm, which has since become a site of pilgrimage and remains the spiritual home of the Order.

The Order today functions as a series of Monasteries and Abbeys that maintains hospices throughout Vara, though it is mostly centred in Calsmeer. Despite its ethos, the vast majority of its members are warrior priests, and many go so far as to join the Legion of Battle, taking the field to ensure that no fallen warriors die in agony from their wounds. Nevertheless, they are all required to serve their indenture in a hospice maintained by the Order, tending those who are insane or dying and comforting those who have lost loved ones.

Since Augustus 1514, almost all of the Death Watch hospices have seen their numbers swell with priests and followers of Liren, as the followers of the Goddess move to take their place as the ones who offer mercy and relief at the end of a person's life. As this happens, the Nerozians are moving more into the role of offering comfort to those who have lost loved ones.

With the Processional at the end of 1516, the Order of the Death Watch has become an organisation of the Church of Liren primarily, and of Neroz second. While members of the church of Neroz still serve as those who offer comfort, it is primarily the priests of Liren who would act on the battlefield.

Benefits: Dress Minor and Major Wounds, Set Bones, Merciful Dispatch (Q.V Throat Slit), Numbing Touch (anaesthetic) for 5 minutes 2/Ad, Remove Symptoms (not Cure) for 1 Adventure 1/Ad, Cure Disease 1/Ad, 1/1 Life Gain.

'Bringers of Death' a group whose main goal is to make undead the master race. Considered very dangerous and none of its members are openly condoned or known of.

‘The Bone Talkers’ a small group whose main goal is to spread the word of Neroz everywhere they can travel. The church openly supports them as they also act as the church’s messenger relay service. There are four members currently and they are as follows:

Regiran Bokk, Celas Loenthum, Gillian Half-mace and Burorem Galliga

Paladinic Order

‘The Order of the Silver Skull’

This is the Paladinic order of Neroz, it has excessively closed ranks as skills are known that are taught nowhere else. There are never more than 750 of these elite warrior-priests. They follow a strict code of reverence for the dead, be it your own or the enemy’s. Rogue necromancers are to be destroyed at all costs; misuse of summoning of the dead is punished by death. Let a death be as quick and painless as possible so that the spirit may move on its way to the nether world

‘The Order of the Silver Skull’

<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Necromancy Sphere Free Raise Zombie 2/Ad Raise Skeleton 1/Ad +1 Level of Art Necromancy Sphere +5 Points of Art Control Zombie 1/Ad Title (Sir/Lady Knight) 300G/Ad Mighty Blow 4/Ad 2/2 Life Gain</i>
<i>Requirements</i>	<i>Enhanced Mastery in Main Weapon Possess Faith Sphere Complete Holy Quest to gain Paladinhood Adhere to Code of Chivalry and Church Ethos</i>

Important Recent Events

Since the Processional at the end of 1516, the ranks of the priesthood have shrunk somewhat, with a good many of their number leaving to find their calling within the priesthood of Liren. Several of the Silver Skulls have also left to join Liren, leaving openings within the Paladinhood that are now eagerly sought by aspirants.

Their Structure of Ethics

All life lives for death.

Death is the only constant.

Our one true purpose is to make sure our life was not wasted and to make sure we died not in vain.

One thing’s death fuels another’s life.

Shashay, Goddess of Darkness

Shashay is the goddess of the dark, patron of thieves, Nightshades and funnily enough, lovers. She is depicted often as a sensual, dark haired woman. Her priests are very good at getting into places unnoticed, finding lost things, and knowing the dirt on their peers. Stealth is their main weapon, as well as a reputation for NOT having to be celibate, but they are not openly promiscuous; they just don't make bones about liking physical pleasure and comfort. Temples of Shashay hold wonderful feasts, are visited by young lovers, and sometimes also host the meetings of the 'Children of Shashay'.

Followers of Shashay MUST wear a black ribbon on their person.

Basic Belief System

Followers of Shashay believe in indulging each and every sense they have during religious ceremonies, almost to the point of overload. Anyone mistaking this attitude or confusing a temple with a brothel is liable to wake up with no money, in a reasonable amount of pain and very much the wiser for the mistake. They gossip, produce a rumour mill and generally dish the dirt, especially if doing so is advantageous to them. Information is available from them at a price.

Since Shashay is the patron of lovers, the church freely takes in any unfortunate 'accidents'. HOWEVER married couples or someone seeking to bury a scandal will tend to find their secret made known to all.

Followers of Shashay tend to be very generous individuals as they have a rather loose definition of personal property; what's mine is yours, **BUT** what's yours is mine.

As an aside, very few of their temples EVER have problems with thieves.

Temple Placements

Every village, town or city will have at least one temple frequently adjoining or part of the Children of Shashay's guild hall/hang out, but it is not obvious that that is what it is. The main temple is located in Pironeas, the capital of Erinan.

The Initiation Structure

Temple maid / temple page.

The brand new initiates into the church. Foundlings left at church have to perform service in that role until their twelfth year before they can make a choice as to what they wish to do for the rest of their lives; many have a tendency to become thieves. They perform all menial tasks in the church as well as being taught the importance of leverage of information on their peers.

Priest/priestess.

These lead ceremonies at smaller temples, constantly vie for power amongst themselves, and almost certainly have links to the thieves' guild in their local area.

Children of the Dark.

Accomplished blackmailers, apothecaries, poisoners and cooks, the Children of the Dark are continuously on their guard for assassination attempts by both those below them and their peers. They are also some of the most decadent individuals on the face of Vara. They lead the congregations/revellers at the major temples, prepare any and all narcotics used by the temples in their area and generally have the most expensive and opulent houses on the area. Any marriage performed by a Child of the Dark, no matter what objection anyone else might have, is considered sacred and binding (elopement).

He who commands.

Consort to the Avatar. Succession is by assassination. He actually performs day-to-day running of the church and his true identity is very rarely known to his peers. (He normally wears the Crown.)

The Avatar

"The Sensate".

Always female, with a matriarchal line of succession; the Avatar is always mother of next Avatar. She never reveals her true identity and always appears masked or otherwise hidden.

Artefact of Shashay, "Crown of Shadows." The Crown has powers to command others and also powers to strike them down. As with all artefacts it is indestructible, calls to hand at will, and is magical at the 10th level of art.

Yearly Celebrations

'The Revel of the Goddess.'

Once a year, there is an orgiastic feast at the main temple at the culmination of which 'He who commands' and 'The Sensate' attempt to conceive the next Avatar. If there is already a child, this NEVER results in a pregnancy; otherwise the child is ALWAYS female.

In other temples across Vara, the highest ranking priest and priestess don the garb of the Sensate and He Who Commands and the evening progresses much as it does at the main temple, although no child is conceived (or if one is, it won't be the Avatar).

This is the biggest celebration in the church's calendar, and all followers are expected to show their devotion and participate at the main temple of their kingdom, if not the main temple of Erinan, once in their lives.

For those who can't get to a temple this is still a night of hedonism and excess.

This is the one night of the year when followers of Shashay put aside their plotting and ambitions. No assassinations are carried out and no blackmail demands are issued or acted on. This is not to say that anything that happens on this night won't be used at a later date, and as only the Sensate is masked on this night, it is considered good form to be gone from the temple or wherever you ended up before sunrise comes.

'The Blinding of the Eye.'

When there is a solar eclipse Shashay is at her height of power; Lanokash is, for the time, blinded without her light and those who would know the unknowable and those whose sights are set above ordinary theft are blessed. And for the lovers, this is a day when there are no limits, and no consequences.

This celebration takes on two forms; for the lovers and for the lovers of intrigue, it is said that such occasions are rare because Shashay herself recognises that were such revels of thieving and blackmail to happen frequently, Vara would be in anarchy and she would lose many of her followers.

This is essentially a free for all. Restrictions are, for this one day, lifted on the requirement for guild sanctioning on jobs, and the blackmail flows freely. It is said that the Goddess looks fondly on spies and thieves on this day as they are rarely caught, and those that are have a tendency to escape custody.

For those less concerned with information and leverage, this is when the extravagance of the church reaches its peak. Temples are draped in all their finery, the drink and other substances flow freely and all revellers are masked. This is a night without repercussions; there are no names, and no child will be conceived through a liaison with a follower of Shashay on this day.

'Lover's Night.'

For the priesthood the longest night of the Winter Solstice is a time of contemplation and decision making. After being blessed by the resident Child of the Dark (or, for those at the High Temple, the Sensate or He Who Commands), at sunset, those who choose to dose themselves up on various narcotics and lock themselves in their quarters to better understand their place in the coming year, hoping to gain insight for their schemes and advancements in the coming months.

Those temple maids and pages that are unsure of their positions may also take part in this ritual, sequestering themselves away with safely prepared substances. When they come out the next day, many take their vows then and there, while others leave the church and others continue on in their current roles until they make their choice.

The name of the celebration comes from the lay person's celebration rather than the priestly rituals. As it suggests, it is a night when, rather than the other grand celebrations that tend to result in drug fuelled, hedonistic orgies, this is a time for unclouded sex.

Sub-sects within the Church

"Night Summoners" *these are very violently anti-Lanokash and express their displeasure in murder, theft and desecration. As a note, most members are Nightshades.*

"Seducers" *specialists in obtaining blackmail material through pillow talk. Not averse to using magic to achieve their aims.*

Paladinic Order

"The Hidden Blades of the Night"

Specialising in surprise attacks and infiltration, these Paladins use stealth and dexterity to protect themselves rather than armour. They will frequently employ means to render uninvolved persons unconscious. Few locks or wards are capable of preventing their intrusion; none of them have ever been captured alive.

"The Hidden Blades of the Night"

Benefits

*Control Sphere free
Darkness 3/ad
Temp Bless 2/Ad
+1 level of Art Control Sphere
+5 points of Art
Title (Sir/Lady Knight) 300G/ad
Fear OR Charm Person 2/Ad
2/2 life gain*

Requirements

*Enhanced Mastery in any Stealthy weapon
Possess Faith sphere
Undertake holy quest to attain Paladinhood
Adhere to the Code of Chivalry and the Church Ethos*

Their Structure of Ethics

Live every moment to the fullest.

Seek new experiences.

Always find out the 'dirt' on people in case you need it for leverage later on.

Never reveal your true agenda.

What's mine is yours, BUT what's yours is mine.

Lanokash, Goddess of Light

Just as Shashay rules the hidden, so Lanokash rules the truth; her priests seek knowledge and enlightenment. Her temples hold great libraries and galleries of art. It is the temples of Lanokash that teach many the arts of writing and her followers compose poems and tales to pass on knowledge to the new generations. It is a surprise to note that holy temples are places of simplicity both in appearance and furnishings; not uncomfortable, but very functional. For small donations a temple may offer to research information for you, and they will always have a side chapel in which tales can be told and stories heard - but only true ones! Followers of Lanokash MUST wear a pure white ribbon on their person openly.

Basic Belief System

The followers of Lanokash prize truth and knowledge above all things and they seek to light dark corners of the world with understanding. To them the most base of crimes is to destroy recorded knowledge or art, but it is interesting to note that they are not so concerned with the creation of art, merely its protection. They help to fund the Historians guild, as well as maintaining the Royal libraries of many of the monarchs of Vara. The faith is centred in Western Calsmeer, as it can trace its origin to an Elven tribe that came from there.

Followers of Lanokash also are aware that one should live life, as when the flame of your life dims out it is the light we have carried that we are remembered by.

Day-to-day celebrations

The initiation ceremony for non-Priests.

First the priest places a golden yellow cloth on an altar (or other suitable surface), placing it so that sunlight falls on it. On this he places the book of Lanokash's tenets, a white marble bowl with clear fresh water in it in the middle, and on the other side a pure white ribbon folded over several times. Each item should be laid with care and reverence.

The priest should then place on his brow his own ribbon of the goddess. After this he should pass his hand over the bowl and bless it in the name of Lanokash, calling to his hand the light of the goddess as he does so to purify the water with his faith and the light of the Goddess.

This done, the priest should stand the far side of the altar from the supplicant.

He should then speak these words:

"Now [Name], you come and stand on the other side of the altar from me, hair unbound, and we shall begin."

He should motion to the place the supplicant should stand.

The priest then holds out his hands over the bowl side by side and palms upwards for the supplicant to place their hands in his.

"[Name], do you enter within this light to give yourself to the Goddess Lanokash earnestly and without reservation?"

The supplicant should reply:

"I do."

With great care, the priest then turns the supplicant's hands over to lie palms upwards; he then dips his thumbs into the blessed water of the bowl and touches the thumbs to the inside of the supplicant's palms then wrists.

He should then lean closer to the supplicant, bringing a certain intimacy to the ritual.

"It is part of the ritual that you tell me a truth of your heart that no-one else knows and swear that it is the truth by your true name. You speak it into my ear and mine alone. For the ear of a priest is the ear of the Goddess of light herself. I will hold that truth sacrosanct and as a trust told to no-one. This I swear upon my heart; on pain that Lanokash herself will make reparation should I falter in that trust."

The priest should then hold the supplicant's gaze.

The supplicant should then speak a truth to the priest.

The priest should then lean close to the supplicant and speak softly into their ear.

The Priest should then dip his fingers into the bowl again, and then place them on the supplicant's head at certain pressure points, each touch releasing tension from her body.

"May the light of Lanokash stand with you and ease your soul with her guardianship."

[The Priest then blesses the Supplicant.]

He then smoothes his thumbs across the supplicant's brow in a band across the forehead.

"Carry your knowledge and the light of your soul into dark places; know that no darkness can ever hold back even the faintest spark of light."

The Priest then reaches down and takes up the ribbon, moving to stand behind the supplicant he places it across their brow and ties it at the back of the head, braiding it with some of their hair if it is long enough and tying it off again.

"Lift up that light when darkness seeks to harm you or others round you, and know by this marker that Lanokash will answer that light with her own; be at peace knowing you are never alone."

"Welcome to the church of Lanokash [Name]. I give you this as a gift." He hands the supplicant the book.

Temple Placements

The temples tend to be in more urban areas or isolated monasteries where contemplation is easy.

There is a training temple at Nasias in the north western mountains of Calsmeer, and there are many temples on both coasts of Dralazar.

The main temple of the church, the Great Library of Al-Shear, is located on the Inland Sea coast of Dralazar and is home to the Lore Keeper.

Temples tend to have large lawns with surrounding orchards and good stout walls enclosing the grounds.

Notable People

Samuel – The Lore Keeper. A Halfling of advanced years, he resides at the Great Library of Al-Shear from where he oversees the running of the Church.

Telerlas Sunbow – an aspirant Paladin from Calsmeer who hails from the line of Avatars of Lanokash.

Dale Iceblood – Nightshade Paladin.

Sir Erildas Lightblaze – Knight of the Blazing Sun and devout follower.

The Initiation Structure

- Acolyte.** *On induction to the church acolytes are taught to read and write at least 1 language in addition to common. As soon as they are fluent in this they go to work transcribing documents to be sent to other temples and as researchers for the temple*
- Priest.** *Priests lead the ceremonies and are in charge of research teams; they also need to learn tales and songs, and most of them are skilled in one instrument or another. They also undertake pilgrimages from one temple to another, each taking with them a few scrolls that they have copied at the temples they stop at if that temple does not have it; in this manner they try to ensure nothing can be lost even if one temple is destroyed.*
- Lore Keeper.** *The head of the Church; he is a man of great knowledge and understands much that others would find beyond them. He resides in the main temple that lies on the shore of the inland sea where it laps against the sands of Dralazar.*
- The Avatar.** *This is passed down the line of Sunbow along with the Sword of Lanokash; unfortunately there has been no Avatar since the last one fell in battle and the sword was lost into the underground in the hands of the Nightshades. The loss of the sword has been a serious blow to the followers of Lanokash.*
- Artefact “Light-hope”** *a sword with a blade of pure light, it carried the powers of light. As with all artefacts it is indestructible, calls to hand at will and is magical at the 10th level of art.*

Yearly Celebrations

The Festival of Light

This festival occurs every year on the 15th of July. All weapons are banned from being carried (except for by the Order of the Rose) and huge feasts are prepared; bright bonfires are set and there is dancing and storytelling all day and night, music is played and hearts are made glad by the revelry. It is considered fortuitous to be married on this day in a temple of Lanokash, providing you can pull the priest away from the dinner table or the dancing long enough to get him to marry you.

Sub-sects within the Church

‘The Seekers’ *these priests are willing to go to any lengths to gain knowledge. They will bully and cajole others into letting them study their books, and will try to make copies or buy originals of books to take back to the temple.*

‘The Bright Dawn’ *these fanatics are conducting a secret war on the followers of Shashay; they hunt out the locations of hidden temples and destroy them, exposing the followers of the dark maiden for their excesses and secrets. They love to bring down the unity of their enemies first by letting their secret plots become known to their peers and watching them backstab each other before they step in to finish the job.*

Paladinic Order

"The Order of Roses"

The Paladins of Lanokash are easy to spot by the tattoos they bear on their sword hands. As they progress in rank they gain small tattoos of blue roses starting with the area between the 1st knuckle and the main joint of the index finger, then the middle finger then the ring finger and so on, culminating with an eleventh tattoo on the back of the hand. This is only granted to those that sit on the Council of Eleven, the leaders of the order. These magical tattoos are bestowed after a great quest or act on the part of the paladin. These men and women never lie, and will protect things as well as people. They seek to sweep away lies and dishonesty in the world.

Given that they have such enlightened pursuits they are some of the most powerful warriors on Vara, as their tactics are well thought out and tested, and they practice often to ensure their skills.

The Nasias temple is where the ancestral family of Avatars live; the line of Sunbow has borne the sword 'Light-hope' for as long as the sword has existed, since the Mystic age in a time beyond memory. The valley has many times come under attack, particularly from the Nightshade followers of Shashay.

"The Order of Roses"

Benefits

*Knowledge Sphere free
Light 3/ad
Temp Bless 1/ad
+1 level of Art Knowledge Sphere
+5 points of Art
Title (Sir/Lady Knight) 300G/ad
Mighty Blow 4/ad
2/2 life gain*

Requirements

*Enhanced Mastery in main weapon
At least 5 R/W skills
Possess Faith sphere
Undertake holy quest to attain Paladinhood
Adhere to the Code of Chivalry and the Church Ethos*

Their Structure of Ethics

Bring light to the darkness.

Bring understanding to the ignorant.

Undertake to ensure no knowledge is lost.

Live brightly while you draw breath.

Bronwen Stormbrow, The Warrior Goddess

The followers of Bronwen respect skill at arms and bravery. Bronwen is the patron of combat, but her special favour lies with those who conduct themselves with honour and equality.

Priests of Bronwen will tend to fight fairly, only using a dagger if that is all that their opponent has, returning a dropped weapon etc.

Followers of Bronwen Stormbrow MUST wear a blue ribbon openly on their body; most put it round their upper arm, but some have a bandanna or rakishly tie it round their throat.

Basic Belief System

While many of the so-called 'evil' races (orcs, goblins and such) follow Bronwen in her more savage aspects. The common folk of Vara happily welcome priests of Bronwen, as you never know when they might be needed to protect against the many evil creatures on Vara. The Church has received much praise in fighting against the Beastmen and Shadowlings, though many of their number have fallen in the wake of the wars. Priests become masters in a range of weaponry so that they may fight fairly against an opponent. They also host large feasts for fighting men and women so that if they die that day they lived to the full beforehand.

Temple Placements

There are few large temples dedicated to Bronwen, but the ones that do exist look more like military academies than places of worship. The main temple in Gralamire has a great hall larger than any other on Vara so that the Priests may partake in great feasts there before they ride to battle. They have many shrines in castles, guardhouses and watchtowers across Vara.

The Troll Lands have two large temples to Bronwen; Noyabrask in the far north, and Tatastagol further to the south.

Notable People

Stormclaw – Lord of Battle and High Priest of Bronwen for the Trolls.

Carnak – High King of Vara.

Conan – Wyldman, always seen with the bright ribbon of Bronwen.

Sourbelly – deceased king of the Trolls; he is now held in high esteem as a follower of Bronwen and ideal example of how one should behave in battle.

Brightstar – Spear Maiden of Bronwen and now Queen of the Trolls.

Jason Giantsbane – for his skill and his ability to train, as well as his past exploits.

Baroness Ragnhild Pure-snow – The Frost-mane head of the Valkyries.

Marquis Ectheow Storm-Fjord – The Frost-mane head of the Storm Knights.

Initiation Structure

- Squires.** Many priests of Bronwen have squires, mainly to carry their armaments for them so that they are ready to take on any foe in fair combat. When they have learnt enough from their master they can progress to novice.
- Novice Priest.** Once a squire has learnt how to fight he needs to put it into practice, novices travel to gain experience and promote the name of the Church and learn what it truly means to be a priest of Bronwen.
- Priest.** Priests are those individuals that have truly given their life to Bronwen; fearless and brave they extol many virtues to inspire others.
- Battle Brothers.** These are head priests and usually oversee temples or are revered heroes amongst the Church.
- The Lords of Battle.** These magnificent warriors form an inner council and oversee the Church itself; the eldest receives the honorary title of War master and is the official head of the Church, although in reality he holds no more power than any other council member other than age and experience.
- The Avatar.** The Avatar of Bronwen has a habit of turning up when most needed; however due to the harsh nature of the life of such a person, the identity of the Avatar changes more often than many of the others. The Avatar is known to be sent to punish those that claim to serve Bronwen with their lives but who bring dishonour to her (NOT limited to priests, but also to fallen paladins/evil paladins that have broken the code in a large way). A new Avatar sometimes has to go and retrieve the spear or holy armour (a lesser artefact) from where they last fell. It is of course considered a great honour to serve in this way. Many have come from the Storm Lancers so that the powers of the fabled Storm Spear can be put to best use.
- Artefact of Bronwen: "The Storm Spear"** its fame stems from its powers as a weapon and command of lightning. Again it is indestructible, calls to hand at will and is magical at 10th level. It grants great strength to its wielder, can throw powerful lightning at opponents, shatter the weapons of an enemy, has some limited powers of healing and can call down a curtain of lightning to prevent the escape of an enemy.

Yearly Celebrations

The Feast of Heroes

The feast takes place on the winter solstice. All the great Temples hold a massive feast in remembrance of all the heroes of the past; many sagas and stories are told and Bards from the Duchy of Kiral tell their tales of history to great rejoicing in the honour of those heroes. Until 1512 no Bard had been persuaded to tell the tale of the battle of Mara, where the last High King fell. As a mark of respect there was always several minutes silence at midnight for those heroes that fought in that great battle; where the only sound was the tears of the Bards falling to the floor.

However as of 1512 and the great events of the 3rd Battle of Mara the full tale is now told, both the bitter victory where Jenia fell and the triumphant victory of Carnak over the Shadowling Lord.

Sub-sects of the Church

The Trolls have a different structure than the norm.

'The Spell Blades' are a society within the Frost-mane Elves that specialise in channelling their powerful priestly magic through their swords.

'The Berserkers' are priests that have fallen to bloodlust; these frothing maniacs live only for battle with no regard for themselves or others and as such are seen as dangerous by the main body of the Church.

'The Order of the Blue Hand' Members of the Blue Hand, should be epitomes of Bronwenian Glory, their mere presence on the battlefield should be enough to sway the battle in favour of the side for which they fight. They are a tight mesh of the finest fighting skills and best tactical knowledge, trained in the most extreme conditions to defeat all comers, in a 1 on 1 fight, there is no doubt the Blue Hand will win. An elite fighting cadre of devout warriors, they have never taken the battlefield on mass, the closest came at Mara where 2 masters, 4 seniors and 8 juniors took the field and wiped a swath against the enemies of light. Recruited from all over Vara, at any one time there are only ever 24 junior students, 8 senior students, 5 masters and the grand master. Willing to share their training with those they deem worthy, several members of both the Storm Knights and the Valkyries have benefited from Blue Hand Tuition.

Head of Order: Eilanlonlian Asarath Vonthal

Tenants:

Requirements:

- Must be Lawful.
- Vow of poverty. (They may keep a subsistence amount and pay taxes, but all other funds to be tithed back to the order through the church.)
- Member of the Church of Bronwen.
- Must be chosen
- Mastery in at least one weapon.

- Never refuse a 1 on 1 duel.
- Always be the last to retreat.
- Adhere to the Code Of Chivalry

Benefits of Membership:

Junior:

2/2 life gain.

Enhanced in 1 Weapon.

Tattoo that allows access through the Baelitas (The Guardian Ward of the Monastery).

(At least 1 year real-time service before advancement)

Senior:

Seniors study directly under the masters and assist in the training of junior students, as such they gain from the masters knowledge.

Tattoo outlined in Silver ~ allows a character with the ability to teleport or shift to teleport/shift through the Baelitas

Master: (may use title Eilanlian [Blue Hand Master])

Tattoo outlined in gold – can raise and lower the Baelitas so that those without tattoo's may enter.

Have a roving recruiting role unless selected for one of the 3 master positions at the temple.

Notable members:

Eilanlonlian ~ Asarath Vonthal (Male Frostmane Elf. Born: 1160, wielder of Vonthal a holy weapon of bronwen)

Callian ~ Amavain Vonthal (Female Frostmane Elf. Born: 1179. Wife of Asarath)

Runa Gudbrand (Female Troll. Born: 1465. Head Housekeeper to the order (Formally wife to Beini Gudbrand, the Smith to the order prior to his murder in 1507))

Tungdil Goldhand (Male Dwarf. Appointed smith to the order 1508)

History:

- 1159 *Thoferath Vonthal a Frostmane elf of mid years was gifted a vision by Bronwen “to you will be born a son, his destiny is to find the blade that was lost, school him well in the arts of combat and sharpen his mind with knowledge”. It was clear to Thoferath that the time had come, the Iceblade, a holy blade of Bronwen and family heirloom for which his line was named, lost by his ancestors was to be found and the family prophecy “Seek not the Iceblade till the time is right” was about to come true.*
- 1160 *Thoferath had born to him a son he named Asarath. Asarath was schooled in all weapons so that he could pick up and use any that he needed, he was tutored by the best weapon masters in Gralamire, Thoferath exhausting his considerable family wealth in the cause. He was sent to study with priests of Bronwen to learn strategy and tactics, to priests of Lanokash to learn knowledge. He was sent to the Legion of Battle to test his skill and gain valuable experience and to the league of pathfinders, to learn the skills of a scout and learn independence.*
- 1186 *Asarath set out on the quest of his life to find the Iceblade. It took him 10 years and during this time he met and married his wife Amavain.*
- 1196 *Finally Asarath tracked the location of the blade down, it was with a tribe of bugbear orcs, with a few casters, and a couple of ogre’s, high in the North Mountains of Gralamire on the borders with the troll lands. He left his wife, and friends behind and set out to complete the task that had been placed before him.*
- 1197 *Asarath faced his foes on a mountain top and barely defeated them; lifting Vonthal he collapsed to his knees gifted with a vision from Bronwen.*
“Well done Asarath, you have proved yourself worthy, now you can complete the task for which you were born, but near here is an island, on the island is a one of my temple’s, its guardian is close to death, you have been chosen to take her place. Then you are to return this training temple to its former glory. It will not be easy, and will be your life’s work”
With this a blue tattoo outlined in silver appeared on the back of Asarath’s right hand, and he was teleported to the island.
In the main room of the temple he found an ancient Frostmane maiden, as he entered the hall she called out to him
“Quickly Asarath the Baelitas is failing”
he ran to her she thrust a amulet into his hand
“Do you accept the mantle, will you become Baelath ath Eilan”
He affirmed he would. The maiden passed, the outline on Asarath’s tattoo went gold and Asarath became the master of the temple.
Over the next few days he explored the temple and the island, it turns out that the island that housed the temple was shaped like a right hand sitting in the middle of a lake. That the sheer sided bowl in which the lake sat was, fed by a waterfall above and exiting through another below. That there was a ward round the temple, which he as guardian could raise and lower, that protected the temple from entry from all but those who were marked with the tattoo. The amulet also enabled Asarath to teach others to high degree of skill in several weapon and enabled the wearer to inscribe the tattoo that allows entry to the Baelitas. That several days walk down stream was the predominately human settlement of Holmstein where supplies could be acquired, and the townsfolk did not know of the temples existence as the temple maintains a cover of being hermetic monks.
- 1197 - *During the next 5 years he staffed and equipped the temple, setting up a structure for the order of the blue*
- 1202 *hand. One grand master, five masters, of which two were roving, the other three had set posts:*
Mallian [Master of War] in charge of combat and defensive training,
Throlian [Master of Sages] in charge of knowledge and all other areas of teaching,
Callian [Master of Faith] in charge of all aspects of religious study.
Up to 24 junior students, and 8 seniors and a staff to manage the day to day chores of the temple.

Paladinic Order

"The Order of the Storm Lancers"

This is the Paladinic Order of Bronwen Stormbrow; these fearless knights seek to undertake holy quests and heroic adventures in the hopes that one day they may have a saga of their own. They are well known and identified from the normal priesthood because of their use of the spear, the favoured weapon of Bronwen. Unlike many other orders they have no real set agenda of their own.

"The Order of the Storm Lancers"

<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Harm sphere free Cause Light Wounds 2/ad Cause Serious wounds 1/ad +1 level of Art Harm Sphere +5 points of Art Title (Sir/Lady Knight) 300G/ad Mighty blow 8/Ad +1 Level of Warrior Life</i>
<i>Requirements</i>	<i>Enhanced mastery in spear (+1 other weapon) Possess faith sphere Complete holy quest to attain Paladinhood Adhere to Code of Chivalry and Church Ethos</i>

Their Structure of Ethics

Fight fair.

Show courage and honour always.

Retreat only as a last resort.

Starsha the Serene, Goddess of Peace

The Church of Starsha believes that all natural things should try to live in harmony. This is why she wishes supernatural things of ANY alignment to be returned to their place of being, hence her dislike of Undead, cursed Lycanthropes and such. Priests and followers of Starsha abhor violence, and will only use weapons as a last resort to defend himself or herself, or the innocent. They will always try to negotiate a peaceful solution to a problem.

Priests of Starsha also suffer from a disadvantage as in combat against a natural enemy they may only do a single; they may apply the benefit of magic, spirit or holy weapons but cannot call higher damage. Against a supernatural creature such as the Undead, elementals and the like they may have the full benefit of their training and items. If in doubt, ask the Ref. whether you are restricted or not in an encounter.

Followers of Starsha **MUST** wear a white dove symbol openly on their body as the symbol of their goddess and her priests may **ONLY** use a staff or a mace as a weapon.

Basic Belief System

Starsha is a gentle goddess of peace, harmony and healing. As such her priests are sought out as master healers and negotiators. They abhor violence and will not even commit an act in self-defence or to save their life, and so while the common people are grateful for their healing powers they often do not understand them. They do see themselves as guardians of the innocent and will defend them whenever they can. Starsha views supernatural creatures as a disharmony on Vara and encourages her priests to find ways to remove them whether that is negotiating or more physical means; she holds no restrictions for dealing with these creatures.

Temple Placements

Temples to Starsha can be found everywhere and often double as hospitals in the cities of Vara; they are also shelters for the homeless and helpless. People often make great pilgrimages to temples in the hopes of being cured of whatever ails them.

Her shrines are mainly places where harmony and peace reign as quiet retreats for her priests.

Appia is home to a large Cathedral, the grounds of which hold the Appian ritual circle and next to that the Aurora Tavern, named for the colours of the ritual circle wards.

The central temple is at a town called Coruscum in Calsmeer, at which the grand conclaves are held.

Notable People

Master Healer Morden – High Priest of Starsha in Calsmeer.

Lucien – Head of the Council of Peace and the ultimate head of the Church

The Initiation Structure

Acolyte.	The neophytes spend time learning inner peace and basic rituals to promote harmony.
Novice Priest.	The novices usually act as wandering healers promoting the name of the Church, and seeing if they can remain true to Starsha's ideals.
Priest.	The priests tend to the sick and run the temples and hospitals; some prefer to remain travelling healers.
Master Healers.	These are the head priests at the temples of Starsha.
The Council of Peace.	The council consists of 12 priests that run the Church; it is led by the young priest Lucien
The Avatar, "The Book-Bearer".	The Avatar is a wise and kindly person, usually a powerful spell caster; augmented by Starsha it is said no one can even think of committing any violent act near them. The Avatar is usually also one of the Council of Peace.
Artefact of Starsha, "The Book of Serenity". This book has powers of healing and calming; as with other artefacts it is indestructible, calls to hand at will and is magical at the 10 th level of Art.	

Yearly Celebrations

The Day of Balance

The festival takes place on Midsummer's day and is a time of contemplation and harmony for the priests of Starsha. It is a time when the rite of Harmony is conducted with all the priests that wish to sacrifice their voice for one year to learn the harmony of silence. It is a very sacred rite and the only one that may speak is the Avatar, who speaks of the truth of harmony and intones the ritual.

Sub-sects within the Church

Strangely there are quite a few sub-sects of the Church of Starsha.

'The Banishers' take a more active role in sending supernatural forces back where they belong; they perform many exorcisms and banishments in the name of Starsha.

Benefits: 2/2 Life Gain, Attract Supernatural 20ft 1/Ad, 10 Blow Aura 1/Ad (when fighting Supernatural), Circle of Protection Vs Supernatural (20ft Radius) 1/Ad.

'The Hospitalers' these merciful (some would say deranged) individuals believe that healing is a right for all and that no one should be a victim of violence, even if they cause it. They firmly believe that after being healed they will see the divine nature of Starsha and follow a life of peace. They have a fluctuating membership as they do seem to get eaten by monsters regularly. They will heal ANY wounded creature they encounter, even to the point of over-casting in order to save the life of a dying creature. However Starsha grants them more powers for this total sacrifice of their soul.

'The Enforcers' believe that peace must be enforced upon people; the Church does not condone them.

Paladinic Order

"The Order of the Shield Bearers"

This is the Paladinic order of Starsha. It seems unlikely but they are actually the most militant order after the paladins of Bronwen. They are highly trained in a large array of single handed weapons so that they may not hurt any in combat unintentionally; they prefer the trusty mace as a weapon because of its blunt head and strong construction for blocking an opponent's blows. They all use shields so that they may block an opponent's attack until they tire themselves out upon the knight's armour and shield. They are steadfast defenders of the innocent and will protect them from harm.

The priests of the Church do not look upon the Paladins with favour because even though they may advocate defence they still train with weapons that may do harm.

They also tank up on the heaviest armour and strongest magical protection they can, willingly throwing themselves into the way of harm to protect another, drawing the violence upon themselves. Some are even said to be able to draw spells away from their intended targets to strike the Shieldbearer instead. They are perhaps second only to the warriors of Bronwen in their skill at arms, exhibiting a control hard to surpass. If they were ever to seek to harm others they would be a lethal force in the land.

"The Order of the Shield Bearers"

Benefits	Healing Sphere free Cure light wounds 3/ad Cure serious wounds 1/ad +1 level of Art Healing Sphere +5 points of Art Title (Sir/Lady Knight) 300G/ad Knockout 2/ad 2/2 life gain
Requirements	Enhanced Mastery in any 1H weapon (preferably Mace) Use Shield Possess Faith sphere Undertake holy quest to attain Paladinhood Adhere to the Code of Chivalry and the Church Ethos

Their Structure of Ethics

Commit no violence.

Heal those that need it.

Promote harmony and peace.

Convince the supernatural to leave the land.

Ash'i'el the Huntress, Goddess of Nature

Followers of the Huntress are taught to respect the flow of life and nature; they never hunt more food than they need and foresters always plant seeds whenever they cut trees or plants. Temples to Ash'i'el tend to be open and full of plants, with simple roofs standing on carved columns (very Roman in appearance). They have few ceremonies apart from the celebration of the turn of each season. Ash'i'el herself is normally depicted as either a small girl or a young woman; she always has long straight black hair and carries a bow.

Priests of Ash'i'el will try to prevent unnecessary killing, and will demand that people return to nature a balance of what they take.

Followers of Ash'i'el must wear the symbol of the leaf on their body. Priests wear a simple white tunic held at the waist by a belt of interlocking golden leaves.

Basic Belief System

Ash'i'el teaches that life is a cycle in which things live and die and nourish one another. Her priests protect the balance of nature and fight to stop excesses of destruction and needless waste. Their ceremonies reflect this balance: some of them are very gentle beautiful celebrations of life and nature, but also some of them are blood rituals where animals are sacrificed; however this is always with the permission of the animal, as it's blood is then used to enrich the earth and feed the people; nothing is ever wasted by the priests of Ash'i'el. Many come to pray to her for a bounty in both crops and livestock, but they always bring some kind of sacrifice; be it money, something precious to the person, or even some of their produce to balance what they ask for.

Ash'i'el has no opposition to fighting, but the chosen weapon of many of her warriors is the bow or the spear.

Temple Placements

Most farming communities will have a small shrine to Ash'i'el, and any large wood is likely to have a small altar hidden away in it tended by one or two priests, but the main temple of Ash'i'el lies past the northern border of Calsmeer, deep in the Wolf Wood and protected by a ward of energy. Behind this is the preserve of 'The Maidens of Ash'i'el' the priestesses who tend the temple; male temple guards assist them. It is said that this temple was the resting place of a great treasure; it is also from here that the High Priestess of the church leads her followers.

Notable People

Sylvana of Foinhaven.

Utgard VorOni – hero of Foinhaven and responsible for the work to replant the battlefield at Mara.

The Initiation Structure

Nymph.	New followers of Ash'i'el; a good proportion of them are foundlings left at temple altars, for while the church wastes nothing, there must be a return for what is taken. Not all remain as priests; many will complete a service to the church and then leave to take up some role in the community as a forester, ranger or even a simple gardener.
Novice Priest.	These perform a lot of the main functions of the temple; keeping it clean, tending the plants and animals, hunting and gathering food. It is they who defend it from attackers. It is once they reach this level of service that they are granted their golden leaf belt.
Priest.	The priests of the church are the leaders of the temples, or the lone hermits who tend isolated altars to Ash'i'el in the woods and advise the woodsmen as to where good game and wood can be found. They are the ones that teach wood lore to youngsters of villages so that they will respect the land and also be safe if lost.
Maidens of Ash'i'el.	The chosen of the church, always female. They have two roles; chief priestesses of the greater temples and tenders of the Main Temple.
The High Priestess.	Currently a woman of about 27 years; she wears nothing that marks her out from any other Maiden of Ash'i'el but her manner easily proves her station.
The Avatar, "The Virgin Huntress".	The Avatar of Ash'i'el has not changed for a great many years; she is not a public figure but does act to protect Vara as a whole from threats.
Artefact of Ash'i'el, "Bow of the Forest Queen." This bow has powers over Nature that cover animal, plant and weather. As well as being a potent weapon, as with all artefacts it is indestructible, calls to hand at will and is magical at the 10 th level of Art.	

Yearly Celebrations

Each turn of a season there is a celebration of the past season and the fruits it has brought; these then go on to thank Ash'i'el for the coming bounty with small sacrifices to her.

The Returning to the Earth

This ritual occurs each year at the moment the first rays of the spring sun strike the altar of the temple; at this moment the neck of a virgin creature is cut (in some lands it has been known to be a person) and the blood is gathered and sprinkled on a secret place where a new tree is planted. This tree is fostered with spells to help it grow faster than a normal tree, and when the next ritual is performed, it is the wood of this tree that is used for the fire that lights the altar and onto which the body of the sacrifice is placed to burn.

Sub-sects within the Church

'City Breakers'. These priests believe that urbanisation is an evil and seek to get people to live in small communities in the woods again, leaving the dead cities to be reclaimed by the land.

'The Urbanites'. This sect works in the cities and castles to ensure that the inhabitants never forget the land that supports them, founding and maintaining wild land areas in gardens and such, bringing animals into these preserves. They fund them with the natural produce of fruit, herbs and honey they collect from these havens of nature.

'The Balancers'. These are a vigilante faction of the church; they are responsible for bodies of foresters and woodcutters left gutted and hanging in the woods for not taking care of the land, taking too much and not re-planting. The more that rich lords seek to destroy forest for profit, the more these violent priests strike at them to try to force them to stop, leaving these grisly markers at the same time as using the bodies to re-enrich the soil, and waking the trees to destroy the tools and carts of the loggers; they are a particular problem in Calsmeer.

Paladinic Order

"The Watchers in the Woods"

The Paladins of Ash'i'el are a much more thinly spread organisation, although they do band together when needed to fight threats to woodlands such as orc war parties. They answer only to the Maidens of Ash'i'el and tend to induct new members from those that act as guards for the main temple. Those who have sacrificed much to defend the land do sometimes get asked to join.

The Watchers are a rarity in that they favour the bow as a weapon, and as archers they are masters par excellence; when mounted they can function as either fast fire support or as light lancers using their spears. But they rely more on dexterity than heavy armour for protection.

The Watchers tend to be mounted troops.

"The Watchers in the Woods"

Benefits	Nature Sphere free Animal Sense 3/ad Hunting +1 level of Art Nature Sphere +5 points of Art Title (Sir/Lady Knight) 300G/ad Sure-Eye 2/Ad 2/2 life gain
Requirements	Enhanced Mastery Bow (Not X-bow) and in any 1 other weapon Riding Skill Possess Faith sphere Undertake holy quest to attain Paladinhood Adhere to the Code of Chivalry and the Church Ethos

Their Structure of Ethics

Protect the Land from harm.

Return a balance of what you take.

Never take more than you need to survive.

Liren, Goddess of Endings

At the battle of Mara, the Great Evil was, for a time, defeated, and so its insidious hold was weakened. At this point, Liren, who has for all of the Ages of Vara been known as the Crone, became strong enough to break through the corruption and hatred and influence certain people to form a cult dedicated to her original self. Since Mara this Cult of Liren grew to around a hundred members spread throughout the kingdoms, and they worked within the Church of the Crone to teach what Liren was before she was corrupted.

Two years after the Battle of Mara, a ritual was performed by the cult and the corruption was purged from the Crone, allowing her to once again act as Liren in the function that she was always intended to.

Followers of Liren must have a tattoo of a chalice openly or easily accessible on their bodies (many have it below the collar bone or the inner forearm). They tend to wear grey or beige robes and carry only a dagger. Followers of Liren may not fall to evil, and if they do so, Liren will withdraw her blessing. The only way to atone is to drink from the chalice.

In the year or so until they succeeded in cleansing Liren of the Crone, the Cult of Liren was heavily persecuted, mostly by followers of the Crone who feared a return to her original nature and a loss of their deity. They were also looked at with serious mistrust by the common folk of Vara, who had over the years of the Shadowling war seen enough cults spring up to be nervous. They were watched closely by the Bards and Heralds as well as all of the monarchs, and faced serious charges when they were caught, especially when offering the Chalice to convicted criminals.

Through the actions of several, the church of Liren was formally acknowledged as a legal church as of the summer of 1516, and by the end of that year, the priesthood was swelled by those priests of Neroz who were called from the God of the Dead to the Goddess of Endings.

The head of the Church is a half-Orc who fled the battle of Mara when the carnage got too much for her. Over the weeks after the battle, she was drawn to other people with similar experiences, who after fleeing had woken with a new sense of purpose and a chalice marked on their skin, and only the vaguest sense of who and what they were before this happened. These people are former members of the Church of the Crone but who have had their tattoos and to an extent their memories wiped. There are still a couple functioning within the Crone cult, hiding what they are.

The church has slowly expanded from its predominant Orcish membership although they do, to an extent still outnumber non-Orc members.

Basic Belief System

The members of the Cult of Liren follow a path of endings, fresh starts, and the inevitable decline of substance into nothing. Liren is the figure who will guide them to the halls of the dead and it is Liren who the people should be praying to for new starts and for blessings to be able to see a task through to its end.

They are not opposed to violence, but would rather seek a peaceful resolution to conflict.

They take in those who have nothing left, who want to forget their old lives and start anew. To this extent their holy item, the Chalice of Liren, has powers to wipe the slate clean, leaving a person with only the skills that they need to survive (eating, reading, basic functions like that) so that they can try to live a better or happier life.

They are a refuge, and when the person chooses to join them, either they can drink from the chalice and be completely reborn, or they can simply choose to turn their backs on their former lives. Whichever path they take, they take a new name.

It is now the priests of Liren who watch over the dying to ease their passing and administer the last rights, such as they are, after which the body is passed to the priests of Neroz, or to the priest of an appropriate church.

Temple Placements

The temple of Neroz in Southern Calsmeer that had been serving as both prison and temple for the early Lirenite priests is now being rebuilt and refurbished so that it may serve as the High Temple of Liren. There will remain a small temple to Neroz, predominantly manned by the Order of the Death Watch attached to the Temple of Liren. The Century that has, up until this point guarded the Lirenite prisoners has aided in the building works and will, with the spring of 1517 withdraw and return to its previous duties.

There are many small temples springing up around Vara now that the church has been legally recognised, modest buildings with plenty of room to house the sick and the hopeless. They are still places that are willing to take in the dispossessed and any prisoner or criminal looking for a clean start. While this does mean that they are still looked upon with some suspicion, the Legion of Battle has made advances about providing some sort of protection, although who that protection would be for has been left vague.

The monasteries and temples where followers of Liren do reside often take in prisoners or criminals who have served their time and want to make amends. Whether they choose to drink from the Chalice or simply take on a new name, they are treated as though they have a blank slate, and are taught new skills to make them useful and productive in the community.

Notable People

Foxglove – the half-Orc High Priestess of Liren. Not only was she responsible for bringing the church into legal recognition, she was also seen around the ritual at the Starshan temple in Calsmeer at the start of 1516, which is still a mystery to a great many people.

Sir Sedge – the first of the Paladins of Liren, this half-Orc wields what appears to be a broken chair leg as his holy weapon, and, since the ritual at the Starshan temple in early 1516, has been seen to be wearing high quality armour of a similar style to the Calsmeerian legions.

The Initiation Structure

Because of the newness of the church, hierarchies have yet to be established, and very few have come forwards to take up priesthoods who have not already had some kind of training in the mystical arts.

Initiates *These are those who have come to the church completely free of any previous priestly experience. They are few in number, and seem to spend much of their time learning to care for the sick and to spend time with those who are beyond saving, as well as being taught the basics of magic.*

Novice Priest. *Those who have learned enough to master the basics of divine magic, these are, or at least probably will be the ones most likely to tend to the ill in the temples of Liren.*

Priest. *At the moment, most of those who are fully fledged priests of Liren are either those who were part of the initial group who swore themselves to Liren after the 3rd Battle of Mara, or those who have more recently moved their oaths from Neroz. They are an odd group, and they are still in many ways finding their feet. They are spreading out around Vara, finding places in hospices and prisons as well as many of the larger towns and cities. Those who have chosen not to settle in any one place spend their days on the road, travelling and offering aid where they can.*

The High Priestess. *Foxglove, a half-Orc, currently living at the temple of Neroz in southern Calsmeer. Foxglove remains the High Priestess of the church, for now, although there are plans afoot for her to step down now that her position as the Avatar has been revealed.*

The Avatar
“”. *During the rite at the end of the Processional, it was revealed that Foxglove is, and has been for some time, the Avatar of Liren, although no formal title has yet to be revealed.*

Artefact of Liren, “The Chalice of Endings”. *This chalice has powers over memory and some healing. As with all artefacts it is indestructible, calls to hand at will and is magical at the 10th level of Art.*

Yearly Celebrations

8th Augustus – this day stands as the day of Cleansing, when the taint of the Great Evil was purged from Liren. This is mostly a day of celebration (which can get a little exuberant, what with most of the priesthood being Orcs) in which those who have passed on are celebrated.

It is also considered a good day to drink from the Chalice, that doing so on one of those days the person will be especially blessed with a safe new life.

15th Octander – this is the day on which the Processional from the Church of Neroz was completed, and as such, it has been marked as the day on which those who wish to join the priesthood will take their vows.

“On the eighth day of Augustus, two years after Liren was cleansed of the corruption that made her the Crone, members of the Church of Neroz who had, over that time found themselves called by Liren commenced upon a pilgrimage. From all over Vara, those who had heard the calling of Liren and the blessing of Neroz to depart left their home temples and made for a fortified temple of Neroz that had become the home of the church of Liren.

They were no small group in number, and as they moved towards southern Calsmeer they came together from individuals to small groups to larger groups, until finally, all had arrived at the temple. At times their journey was joined by Lirenite priests who answered questions and allayed some fears.

When they finally reached the temple they were welcomed with open arms and given time to spend with those who had practiced what was to be their new faith.

Some found that their old faith still held too much sway over them; they left again to consider and to pray and went with the blessings of their gods.

The last of the Nerozians arrived at the temple in the late house of Octander 10th, filling the temple to the brim. On Octander 15th, all gathered in the main courtyard before Foxglove, the Lirenite high priestess, and the Nerozian priest of the temple.

It all started a little slowly, shakily, the half Orc not really sure what she was saying, but as she spoke she became surer, and then after, people who were there would speak of her taking on an aspect of the Goddess, the human looking figure inhabiting the same space as the half Orc, and the hollow voice that spoke out from the face of the priest of Neroz.

One by one the Nerozians came forward to drink from the Chalice, not to forget, but symbolically to be purged.

No matter how many drank it never ran dry, and there was nowhere near the pain that was expected as skull necklaces and embroidery were subsumed into the flesh as a tattoo of the Chalice.

All day they went on; oaths were rescinded and resworn in new names, and by the end of it the ranks of the church of Liren were swelled.

After, because they could, there was celebration, for things had finally been settled and righted within Vara.

And from then on it was known that while an initiate may swear to the church on any day of the year, only on Octander 15th would they be able to make their final vows and swear themselves as priests to the church.

Also, it was from this learned that Foxglove was actually the Avatar of Liren, and she decided that someone else should probably take over the High Priesthood, and things were set in motion for someone to be chosen.”

Sub-sects within the Church

The Order of the Death Watch

While the Order of the Death Watch was started as a Nerozian order, since the return of Liren to the pantheon, it is her followers who have started to pad out the small order with their numbers. They are now the ones who administer to the dying, while the Nerozians are more involved in comforting those who are left behind. The order is slowly growing into a neat joint organisation, with its main base of operations now in a large Nerozian monastery in southern Calsmeer.

Paladinic Order

“ ”

Even now, the Paladinic Order of Liren is still very small. Led, formally now, by Sedge, the order has finally reached double figures, mostly down to those Silver Skulls who left the church of Neroz to dedicate their lives to Liren.

The Order acts mostly to protect the priests and priestesses as they move around Vara, and to escort those who wish to drink from the Chalice to the High Temple.

They style themselves in Calsmeerian armour, in shades of brown and grey, after the armour that Sedge was given early in 1516.

There is still yet to be a name for the Order decided.

“ ”	
Benefits	Entropy Sphere Knight Title (200 G/Ad) +1 Level of Art in Entropy +5 Pts of Art Sleep 2/Ad 2/2 Life Gain Turning of the Sun 1/Ad Steadfast 1/Ad
Requirements	Enhanced Mastery in any 1 handed weapon Possess Faith sphere Undertake holy quest to attain Paladinhood Adhere to the Code of Chivalry and the Church Ethos

Their Structure of Ethics

Ease the suffering of the dying.
All things must end.

Other cults and sects

The Crone, Goddess of Corruption

Rotting meat, poison, decay; all these things are the purview of the Crone, twisted and fetid she hates nature and beauty. Anything coming from her will turn on the recipient at some time. The hedge witch that demands strange deals and bargains is her servant; no wonder then that she is somewhat a patron to the Orcs and Goblins, who call her the “Smelly Muvver!” It is her influence that leads them to some of their worst excesses of destruction and despoilment of the land.

Followers of The Crone **MUST** wear a tattoo of a cup on their body.

Basic Belief System

The followers of the Crone are without a doubt evil; they are usually bitter and twisted individuals that have been pushed to the fringes of society or those that have seen the underlying corruption of the world and want to get back at it in any way they can. Some do this through corrupting the weak and innocent, some through destruction and despoilment. Corruption and pestilence always follow in the wake of the Crone. Advancement in the Church is usually achieved through assassination.

The typical Crone follower is the origin of the stereotype of the evil witch off in the woods.

Temple Placements

Temples are usually in horrible places of corruption such as swamps or the desecrated remains of other temples. The church does not announce its temples, and in reality they are more like secret Covens anyway. Woe betide any poor fool that stumbles across a temple of the Crone for they will see their worst nightmares come true.

The Initiation Structure

There is no formal structure, but there is definitely a hierarchy.

Witches. This is a common term for the equivalent of priests of the Crone.

Hags. They could be seen as head priests for they lead the covens of the Crone.

The Three. No one knows who the three are but they are thought to be powerful witches of the Crone, and anything living withers and dies at their very touch.

The Avatar The Avatar was known by this name as it was thought that she was the most repulsive

“The Hag Queen”. of all the Hags that serve the Crone, and that her body had been corrupted so much it was no longer recognisable as any race native to Vara.

Artefact of the Crone “The Cup of Corruption”. Its powers are those of harm, as well as producing many poisons and such. As with all artefacts it is indestructible, calls to hand at will and is magical at the 10th level of Art.

Yearly Celebrations

No one knows if there are any specific rituals connected with the Crone for they are secretive and any that are performed would best be left outside of common knowledge for the depravity and disgustingness of what may occur.

Sub-sects within the Church

The Orcs worship the Crone as the “Smelly Muvver” and see her role mainly as destruction and desecration.

The Orc priests take more of a ‘shaman’ type style.

‘The Daughters of Corruption’. These followers can somehow get around the normally corrupting influence that affects looks, either that or they have mastered illusions, and seek to bring down organisations and even the kingdoms from within by sleeping their way into positions of power where they can speak honeyed lies into the ears of those of weak will and mind.

Paladinic Order

"The Decaying Ones"

The paladins of the Crone are corrupted beyond imagination. Living within their suits of armour, encrusted with filth and disease they spread corruption in their wake. They destroy nature and taint all that was beautiful with their foul presence. The worst thing about these individuals is that unlike the forces of Undeath these wretches still 'live'.

"The Decaying Ones"

Benefits

*Mighty blow 4/ad
2/2 life gain*

Requirements

*Enhanced Mastery in main weapon
Possess faith sphere
Undertake holy quest to attain paladinhood
Adhere to Code of Chivalry (when they have to) and Church Ethos*

Their Structure of Beliefs

All that was pure will be corrupted.

All that was beautiful shall be made repulsive.

All that is built will fall into decay.

The Noble shall be brought low by their own hands.

The Cult of the Great Evil

The Great Evil works in many ways, one of which is the gathering of followers, including priests dedicated to its service whose powers vary greatly as do their agendas. Some of them were originally priests of other deities who fell to corruption and turned their backs on the faith they once had.

Followers of the Great Evil will have a mark on their bodies somewhere in a strange runic text. This mark tends to be hidden or out of sight but will glow with an aura of evil if observed under spirit sight. It is a crime to be a follower of the Great Evil.

Basic Belief System

The cult of the Great Evil exists to further his aims on Vara and to sow chaos, mistrust and evil wherever they can. Some do so with great subtlety while others are more blatant about it. They also seek to corrupt others to the cause where they can. Certain cults will serve demons and it is noted that some cults are both experimenting with creating strange creatures or with corrupting the souls of children to the service of the Great Evil.

The Celestial Wings

The Celestial Wings are a cross faith organisation of militant priests and Paladins of many faiths who have been trained by the High Priest Morden to fight the forces of the Great Evil and Demons. Appending their own church iconography with a wing symbol they stand for the powers of good and made no small account of themselves at Mara. Since then they have aided in mitigating inter-church conflicts and act to oppose the Great Evil wherever they can. In some ways they are seen as the faith based equivalent of the Broken Sword in that regard.

Entry into the Celestial Wings is very select, they refuse to teach those who are evil or who might abuse their powers rather than use them for the betterment of others. While they accept that members will have different opinions on matters such as the Undead, they do not allow this to get in the way of their greater goals, agreeing to respect each other's opinions and resolve such conflicts when away from the wider aims of the Celestial Wings.

Benefits:

Celestial Wings 2/Ad

Celestial Armour 1/Ad

Angelic Aura 2/Ad

Sword of the Celestial 1/Ad

Total Heal 1/Ad

2/2 Base Life Gain

Mighty Blow 4/Ad

Strength of the Faithful 1/Ad.

These abilities stack on top of any Paladin or Church innates if a Paladin.