

2013



THE LAND 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 World of Pathfinder

Overview

The setting of the game is made up of six main kingdoms, a few other realms outside the borders of these, and the uncharted lands and seas beyond that.

Geographically the setting is one large landmass, bordered East and West by seas that have not been explored, by uncharted forest lands beyond the southern border and to the North, beyond the mountain range, lies the Domain of the Trolls. Beyond that the land cools and becomes a snow-locked waste that no-one has explored for untold millennia.

Creation

In the beginning there were the forces of Good and Evil: so immense were they, and so caught in enmity that should they confront one another directly each would cease to be in an instant.

Thus Good split itself into five parts, the greater part remained the force of good, while the lesser four became the older of the gods;

Osrose god of Life, tall of stature with wide shoulders, ice blue eyes and pale blond hair, stern of voice but fair in all things.

Neroz god of Death, tall and slim, his hair cropped close to his head, thinly fleshed and with a calm melodious voice. Lanokash goddess of Light, bright mannered, with tousled blond hair and green eyes, round cheeked. Always ready with a song or joke and prone to dancing, yet wise beyond measure.

Shashay goddess of Darkness, whose seeming depended on the viewer; graceful and soft toned, she knew all secrets and the ways to use them.

The Gods grew and from their unions sprang the younger gods, known also as the four divine sisters.

From Osrose and Lanokash sprang Starsha, goddess of peace and healing. Always quiet, with compassion to tame the wildness of her sisters, her eyes a warm jade and her hair as white gold; her hands soothed hurt and released pain, her voice turning anger to reason.

From Neroz and Lanokash sprang the warrior goddess Bronwen, called Stormbrow. Proud in baring and with eyes tawny like an eagles, her hair like a river of fire down her back, her strong arm teaching all but Starsha the ways of weapons; between battles she paced the skies like a tiger, fierce and ready for the next call to arms.

From Neroz and Shashay sprang Liren, goddess of endings who later became the Crone. Liren of all the sisters was the most fair, eyes blue as a summer morning sky, hair a warm brown that rippled and curled about her. Golden hued skin covering a frame tall and willowy, with arms to enfold those whose time had come in a soft embrace to carry them on to their rest in her father's realm.

Last from Osrose and Shashay sprang Ash'i'el, the virgin goddess of Nature. Small, capricious and fleet of foot, with jet-black hair and skin pale as the moon on the silver surface of a lake, her unshod feet danced as she played with the other gods; always she looked as a young girl to the others.

The gods struggled mightily against Evil and beat it back to exist on the borders of all that is, but in doing this great thing several of them became tainted by it. Liren, who stood in front of her sister Ash'i'el to protect her in the final divine battle, was washed in the energies of Evil and became ancient in appearance; twisted, burn-scarred and changed into the Crone, forever bitter at her sister and her fellow gods for allowing her beauty to be torn away and mangled. Bronwen allowed love of combat to seep in over her noble sense of honour; Ash'i'el began to see her virtue as inviolate and by extension violation of her domain was to be answered by force. Lanokash and Shashay disagreed and the light tried always to reveal the hidden things, while darkness sought always to use the secrets of the world for gain. Osrose became rigid and less tolerant of the others. Neroz became withdrawn and shunned by the others, who feared he knew how to kill them.

With Evil banished, the altered gods fell to squabbling between themselves and so titanic were their own powers that Good decreed that they would henceforth struggle in a great game for dominance; that game is the vastness of reality.

The Gods created the elemental forces and from them spun into being the lands of which Vara is but one and from these forces came forth life in the shape of the Elemental courts; thus were born the first living things other than the Gods. The Elementals spread out and the paths trod by the rulers of each court became the lines through which power crosses the world.

Then the Gods created the Source, wellspring of all Art and magic; when the rippling streams of its overflowing energy met with a nexus formed by several elemental paths crossing, there appeared eggs from which were born the first of the dragons, the first true life born of Vara, mighty and strong, with Magic interwoven into their very being. Born of the earth they reflected it, the brilliance of the Gemstone Dragons, the bright glare of the Metallic Dragons, and the stolid endurance of the Chromatic Dragons whose legacy was stone.

Looking down on the world from their seat in the heavens, the Gods were pleased, and thus they began to bring forth creatures for artifice or for pleasure; through this was Vara populated with animals, birds, fish and such-like. When the Gods worked together creatures of beauty unsurpassed were crafted; thus came to be the Unicorns and the Pegusi.

Good itself brought forth the first Elves, then withdrew to watch, acting only through those it touched as intermediaries. Thus it watched the game and sought only to be and to guide from afar.

The First Elves were the Great Mother Asamaru, and the Great Father Toluki; together they bore a son whom they called Iasu. Then Toluki went forth and lay with the Queens and Princesses of the elementals, and from his seed came forth many powerful or strange creatures of the world. At the same time the elemental Kings and Princes came and lay with Asamaru, and from her came forth the great clans and the minor bloodlines of the elven people.

As her children bred and spread across the land, at last Asamaru and Toluki came together once more, and she bore him a son Inelu, brother to Iasu. The brothers walked between the elven clans, and where they lay with the daughters of the clans, the ties of elven blood were strengthened. But never was there born to any daughter one who was of Asamaru & Toluki's line; always they took the powers and seeming of their maternal line.

Then Evil, in the form of the great darkness, attacked again, having gained entry into the fabric of the world through the flaws in it made by the squabbling gods bringing it into existence without true harmony. With it came its twisted servants, and the powerful forces of the demon armies. The elves fought to destroy it; the dragons flew and burned it out of the air. And when all seemed lost, the Celestials descended from the heavens sent by Good as a final direct gift to aid the fledgling world and to thwart its enemy. With wonder gazed the Elves upon the Celestials, possessing a grace beyond mortality, able to fly in the heavens and cure the greatest wounds with but a moment's tender care. Yet in battle they were fierce and dedicated, hewing down Demons with a fervour that spoke of unswayable enmity.

Between them, the forces of good beat back the great darkness, but as a cost terrible to bear, for Toluki fell at the final battle, his body ripped and mangled on the spears and claws of howling demons. Celestials and demons died locked in savage combat, falling from the sky like tears and when evil fled it held onto many of the dark places of the world, aided by his twisted servants whom he had forged from elementals and other creatures stolen away in the night and remade by his fell power. Thus came into being the Trolls, Orcs and Goblins, the foul monsters of the world that prey on all peoples, yet in the core of their hearts embers of good could still burn if fanned early. For evil is flawed always, and thus are its works.

The Celestials, their purpose fulfilled, withdrew to sleep until needed again; the Demons also kept to their dark places and to a council far removed from the other followers of Evil and a long slow age of strife began; this age of heroic deeds and dark happenings became known to us in legends as the Mystic Age.

Slowly Evil's power crested in its scope though never did it force a great fight, but sought to weaken and divide the elves and other races through skirmish after skirmish and through betrayal and subterfuge. Thus it came to pass that Inelu, filled with pain at the death of his beloved brother and his trusted companions, resolved to seek the heart of the darkness and end it once and for all. His breaking with his people was one of hurt and acrimony, thus it was with anger he passed out of lands known and out of sensing.

His passing beyond knowing took the heart from Asamaru whose millennia weighed on her deeply, and with her waning began the splintering of the children she had borne. The constant demands of her brood to settle disputes eventually drove her to send all but a trusted few away from the great citadel she lived in and bid them never to return unless called to serve her. Though she maintained communication with the rulers of the clans, she began to fade from memory as those that remembered died, and the citadel crumbled and sagged upon itself until it became a vast mountain of piled stones hidden under the grass and trees of wilderness, the forgotten Mother of a race dwelling within its heart.

The 1st Shadowling War

Many generations passed, and Asamaru became a faint memory; then came the nights of terror, every and all elves waking chased from sleep by nightmares too horrible to contemplate. Soon after came tales of outlying communities disappearing or found slaughtered in brutal ways, but never was there found any sign of the attackers. Thus it was for several fear filled years until the great forest of Azran in the north was raised to the ground, and from the smoke and flame, over the bodies of slaughtered Treewalkers, strode an army of figures who seemed from beyond mortal ken, with dragons of the same shadowy substance wheeling above them. A sea of glowing eyes of many colour were they, and thus the tale of the ravaged forest was made known to the leaders of the elven people; thus was the name of the Shadowlings entered into history.

Though many disagreements stood between the different branches of the elven race, all of them knew they could not stand alone; thus was an alliance forged between them all. Thus was the first great battle made in the northern lands. Mighty Lords of Ice and Fire stood there arrayed with their warrior kin, backed by archers who had escaped from Azran, while Dragonriders from the desert kingdom, who had trod the sands of the hatching grounds and welded their lives to a Dragon mount, rode aloft and all thought this was the hour of victory.

The first rank of the enemy was cut down by volleys of the Brethren of Azran, and faded as if never there upon falling. Hot blood fell from the sky as Dragonriders engaged Shadow dragons and riders in the grey sky above the battle. The ranks of the elves broke three charges that day against their shields, then strode forth to take the field, but then from a pavilion of black silk standing at the core of the Shadowling ranks strode forth an armoured figure who stood taller, who waded chest and shoulders above the ranks of Shadowlings towards the Elven lords as though the press of combat were but a still lowland river. Thus it was that the terrible master of this army, The Darkling Lord, showed himself at last.

His sword was a strange dark steel, with a pommel stone like a pearl the size of a warriors fist; with this fell blade he hewed down the Lord of fire, and dealt the Lord of ice a mortal wound as he stepped over the riven body. It is said that where that sword drew blood, none survived the wounding long. Where Dragonrider and mount stooped to strike him they were blasted from the sky by bolts of dark power. The ranks broke and the army ran, thus was the first battle lost in pain and fire.

Battered survivors returned to the council of war and told the tales of the dark revelry enacted upon the slain on that now cursed field of battle. Mages, drawn and tired for sleep now was a fleeting treasure with the force of the nightmares besetting them, studied and worked to find some weakness in this foe.

At last they formed a plan, even though it took months and many mighty heroes fell to the blades of the Shadowling forces, all to buy time and knowledge to find a way to win before all was lost.

The Gods themselves looked down on the Elves in their plight and with pity inspired certain artisans to forge items of power; into these eight vessels they poured their powers. Thus the Artefacts were created, and granted to champions chosen to wield them in the battles to come. It was said that these champions were at times overtaken by their deities to speak to the people and these Avatars brought with them final hope and knowledge that at last created a desperate plan through which this terrible war might be won.

At the foot of Demovant, in the sands of Dralazar, arrayed the last of the forces of the Elves. Hollow eyed were they, for the night before had held neither rest nor sleep; dreams themselves now revealed as a weapon of the Shadows to stab at the hearts and courage of the Elves. Entire flocks of dragons were ready on the mountainside to rise and protect them from the stooping attacks of the Shadow Dragons. The council stood with hand picked masters of the Arts in the centre of the line, eleven elves bent to one cause, one aim and no other; to that end they each wore a silver fillet which declared that unity of spirit.

As the armies clashed, the eleven were ringed five ranks deep by the most able of the elven warriors; these armoured sons and daughters sworn to Bronwen and Starsha sold their lives dearly to get them before the Darkling Lord, and then they enacted their plan.

Little is known of the forces they brought into play, but when the conflagration of light, fire and storm faded, the field of battle was clear of the Shadowling army, the skies were empty of their dragons, and only a sword lay in the centre of the crater where the council had made their stand. About lay the dead and dying of the elves, and much fewer the bloody, battered and almost broken survivors.

Asamaru then walked among the elves to that sword, and striking it with her own blade, she sundered it into three. She called to her wayward descendants, and bade them chose eleven of their most worthy to serve her will, taking the pieces and guarding them against when the Shadowlings would seek to retake them and forge the blade anew. Eleven were chosen to honour the sacrifice made by the council for the lives of all elves. At this a great wailing rose from the survivors, for they knew that they had not forever freed themselves from the terrors they had borne. They called out to Asamaru, begging her to tell them why this was so, but she only shook her head grimly and walked away Southwards in silence.

The Fading of the Dragons

In the years that followed the battle, the Dragons began to enter a long sleep, becoming fewer and fewer in the skies until seeing one became an omen of luck. Where before riders had stopped at villages and towns to bring news, and where cities now lost in the war had dedicated huge plazas to the landing and caring for these mighty allies, now rare visits of riders were moments of joy to tell to generations to come. In Dralazar the Clans of the Sun no more saw sons and daughters walk to the burning sands to there find a companion mount, for now a laying of a clutch of eggs was a rare happenstance.

The glorious cities of the Elves began to die slowly, for with so few of them left such grand halls were unneeded; the elves withdrew to more hidden and safe homes, turned inwards to rebuild their clans and spread them out so that no more bloodlines could be lost the way many had in the days of the war. Contact between the clans became sparse and conflict for resources or over misunderstandings began.

An era faded and with it the Mystic age ended.

The Rise of Man

From small wild family groups and rough communities, men rose in ability and knowledge, rising from small barbarian clans to build kingdoms and empires. In the recovering lands where once stood the glory of Azran, now a darker forest grew, but in it the beginnings of what we know as Calsmeer was forged as an empire of warrior clans. The enlightened mages of the South, taught by the followers of Osrose and guided by the Treewalkers and Clearwaters established a prosperous agricultural monarchy, with this guidance was coupled with the vigour and drive of a human lifetime. There resulted a rapid growth and expansion; it was the gathering of tradesmen to talk, settle disputes fairly and share knowledge in dedicated halls that formed the birthplace of the Guilds we know today. The adaptability of Man and his tenacity, his willingness to go back and try again where many others had failed and died before won him great advances where the elves had simply given up and chosen not to risk again.

They began to sail the inland sea, to trade and explore. Yet few came to the large island in the centre of that sea. Instead only those driven onto its shores by storm or other misfortune settled there, the pool of skill soon building an efficient and prosperous society. After only a few centuries it rose to become a nation of sailors and scholars the envy of the other human lands. Yet always they refused to ally with any other nation. It was long suspected that some great secret was held on the island, yet its natural and man-made defences repulsed any force sent to investigate this theory.

The Return of the Dragons

On a fateful day a pair of human children, boy and girl twins, stumbled out onto the hatching sands from a raided caravan. Half mad with thirst and fear, they hid from the searching elves amid the decades of cast off empty eggs; it was only when the cry of the master of the mountain alerted the guardians that they saw a wonder before them. In a hollow amid a cluster of old shells the human twins lay sleeping, a pair of newly hatched dragons curled round them in defence and crooning a gentle murmur of comfort. With great foresight the master of the mountain spared their lives and raised them himself, teaching them all he knew. The twins Adren and Edira became the most gifted riders of their time, and when they rose to command the mountain, they decreed that humans too could petition to bring their children to the sands. With the vitality of men and their brief and bright passions, the dragons returned to the skies in greater numbers, though never again would vast flights go to war as the past ages of conflict had depleted the dragons greatly.

The First High King

The creation of the position of high king came after a decade of great hardship for the five kingdoms; years of drought, famine and the appearance of massive armies of Orcs and Goblins had taken a terrible toll on the lands. After numerous border skirmishes over resources, but lacking the manpower or resources to launch full blown war, several of the Monarchs came to the central Island of Kiral to meet in neutral territory under the watch of Mealnos, the ruler of the domain. Under his guidance they agreed to trade the spare resources they had to ensure all their people survived. So wise was he that when the emperor of Calsmeer died heirless, the Senate chose to appoint Mealnos regent until a new leader was chosen. After several years of acrimonious debate, political manoeuvring and assassination in Calsmeer, Mealnos decreed that the inherent instability of an Empire was not in the interests of the northern land; thus he travelled its many regions and eventually chose a family to take command. He kept his plan secret until arriving at the Capital of Appia under guard of the legion assigned to him and his own Guard of Kiralian warriors, and at the senate announced his decision and choice of Dalten DanPedran as Monarch of Calsmeer. DanPedran took the name of Pedrianly in order show he would act for the people and not just for the highlanders. Though the outcry was loud, an impassioned hour long speech and debate by Dalten swayed the Senate to realise that he was not only right for the people, but also that he had a vision and grasp of politics and infrastructure that would bring them through the hard time they faced and out the other side stronger than before. Though it is also said that the purge of corruption that followed his coronation was frightening in its efficiency and ruthlessness, for Dalten brought in a hundred of the highlanders to act as his personal guard, and as soon as they arrived he had them trained by the best of the legion commanders. These men all forswore their traditional family tartans and took to wearing plain jet-black garments to show the depth of their loyalty and dedication to the service Dalten's line, thus was the 'Kings Century' created.

With Dalten's council, Mealnos then went directly to Gralamire, though during his passage his guard was whittled away by ambushes by the humanoids, and raids by Trolls. Eventually he alone arrived at the gates of the fortress capital of Gralamire, muddy, unshaven and ragged with only his horse and a single pack-animal carrying his remaining food and his armour. There he stood before the Frostmane King Alinarith in his throne room and challenged him to a duel, his life wagered against Alinarith agreeing to defer to him in matters between the Kingdoms. The warrior King looked upon this insolent and scruffy human before him, and laughed, secure in the knowledge he, a Frostmane with a legacy stretching back thousands of years, would beat Mealnos who he saw as a mere infant of an upstart race.

The pair met in full armour in the grand hall less than an hour later, Mealnos having had time only to wash, shave and don his armour alone. In a furious fight Mealnos managed to batter the Elven king to the ground, though it cost him an eye and wounded him enough to take to a bed for a month afterwards. His stubborn refusal to take mystical healing but to recuperate naturally as was the tradition of honour duels in Gralamire, along with the Alinarith's sworn word meant that as soon as he could stand unaided Mealnos was brought into the throne room, and there Alinarith knelt and swore oath. Thus was the High Kingship over all the lands of the five kingdoms finally achieved. The calendar of Vara dates its year zero from the year that Mealnos was formally crowned High King in Kiral's hall.

The summer after, all the monarchs gathered in Kiral; there treaties were made, The Legions marched with the riders of Gralamire, the scouts of Amatukiland and the war mages of Erinan against the hordes that ravaged the lands and the ships of Dralazar, the port of Celtar along with those of Kiral carried much needed grain and supplies to the blighted Calsmeer. Through the raw benefits of co-operation the High Kingship proved its worth. With the unifying of the currency, eliminating crippling exchange rates and their burden on the poorer countries, all of Vara entered a new golden age of expansion and discovery.

“The Tale of the 3rd Battle of Mara”

What follows is an abridged version of the tale as composed by Harrallion, master-bard of Vara. The full work is much longer and details many exploits both large and small, covering moments of heroism and despair both from the fateful day.

“Battle Opening”

It came to pass that I beheld the plains of Mara, laid out before me as in the time of old, no more a barren waste but instead covered with the surging life of the multitudes of Vara. Many men and women stood there on the plain of Mara, Elves rubbing shoulders with dwarves and trolls. All of them with a forlorn hope that they might withstand at least the first charge, for Calsmeer had not come.

Calsmeer, land of the wolf; at the last Battle of Mara they had held the centre and been the bulwark of the people against the dark with their legions, but as the morning lengthened we knew they were not to come. No troops of that magnitude could be moved without being known and now the betrayal of the wolf to the High King was evident. We should not have trusted a king back from the dead.

The enemy’s number swelled, a tide of dark creatures, yet for all the oppressive power of this horde not one of the hated Shadowlings could be seen in its number.

The monarchs stood on a rise, at their backs the camp of the Renraniay with its flags fluttered in the wind as a palpable silence enshrouded us all. Light pitched opposite darkness, each waiting for the other to move.

Then I saw it, a small flash of white against the grey-green of the plain, a single mote of brightness charging at the enemy lines. Rushing to pull out my spyglass I discovered it to be what at first I thought was a white dog, then I saw the easy ripple of its back and the long loping stride of a wolf. The air about it seemed to glow with an aura all of its own.

Alone it charged, and many thought it a succinct summation of the pointless hope we all had, a winnow of chaff on the wind over a blaze, to be consumed unnoticed by the enemy. Closer it came to the lines of the foe.

Then, all of a sudden, there was a brief flash of light, white like the wolf. Behind the brave beast rode a wedge of men, wrapped in tempered steel, tabards blazoned with the image of the beast they followed and high above them snapping the twin banners of the King of Calsmeer and the Order of the Wolf. A pang of hope surged in my chest, for even as futile a gesture as it was, Calsmeer had at least sent someone. However before even the ragged cheer of the men could reach me, there was a brighter, bigger flash. Behind that wedge there came a wave of men on horses as the entire heavy and light cavalry of the Legions of Calsmeer burst onto the field, lances already sweeping down into line as they spurred their mounts into a breakneck torrent of force.

The wind carried a surprised sound, an in draw of breath for a yell as something built in each of us at watching this defiant act, as if Robert Pedrianly had taken our hearts, and made them as one with the will of the men who even now rose in the saddle in preparation for the moment of contact.

For that blessed king, and shame to he who does not bless the name of Pedrianly after this day, gave us our fighting chance. There was a rippling wave of light, and a noise like an endless roll of thunder as before our lines all the legions of Calsmeer arrived. I discovered later that the King and a select pair of his generals had planned this, had taken a gamble in order to protect his people to the last moment, and then had sought to not burden the supply lines nor camps of Mara with his men until that very moment when they were needed. With the same shining courage he and the loyal men of Calsmeer had seized the front line, taken it for themselves to draw the brunt of the battle and show us all that the Land of the Wolf would stand with the other four kingdoms, would never shirk or turn away as they had in the dark years under Ethan.

The roar of our army in joy and shock was drowned in the titanic pounding of the hooves of the charge; there was a moment when the lances were the only bridge between the wedge of Calsmeer and the dark horde of the enemy. Then the charge slammed home, drove deep into the lines and all the time more and more horsemen swept the breach wider.

We yelled, we screamed, we threw our fury into the very teeth of the darkness, and then the Demons began to dive from the skies above us.

“The Fight in the Sky”

For a time there was nothing but chaos; the demons hit us when we had nothing in the air to fight them, the fell beings threw down balls of energy as baleful as those that cast them. Yet relief came: from the rear ranks, from the tents of the healers, from all over the field men and women with the white dove on their robes rose on glowing wings, armour made as if of the light we stood to defend shrouding them and weapons that beaconed hope rose and fell in their hands as the fight was taken to the skies. Behind them a corps of Shield bearers took to the air, a spike that sought out the largest of the demons, and with swinging mace and sword hammered them to the earth. The hot blood of the battle above fell on us like the tears of the goddess herself. The children of peace turned to war and showed us how fearsome they could be. Never will I stand by while the brethren of Starsha are mocked for their calm ways again. They bought us time to fight and the safety of the skies.

On the Eastern flank the South Essen of Erinan were falling back, waves of goblins coming at them faster than they could cut them down. Volley after volley of magical power came from the ranks of Major Edgeman's men; when they had no room to aim they stood and fought hand to hand, green and silver jackets darkening to black under the slick of gore. To the West the Storm Lancers, hardy knights of Gralamire, held the ground they had been tasked to hold, the heavy plate armour yielding time and again to the blades of Orcs but each time another man stepped in to cover his fallen brother and take his place while squires pulled the wounded and dead back and away from the lines.

In the middle a large contingent of mixed troops stood, made up of volunteers and allied mercenary bands from the Legion of Battle and other groups. Central in the mass stood the Red Lady of Calsmeer, a silver fillet on her brow, other notables stood by her. Uushki Mag the crossbowman, the companions Thornton and Sherbet, The fell mage Ashym. Focused on the battle before them they were surprised beyond measure when the group behind them drew blades and began to strike about them at any and all in their reach. The lead warrior threw off her helm and revealed a face akin to Nerys' as she dove at the valiant lady of Calsmeer and sought to embed her daggers in the fragile flesh, truly a traitor to us all. However the Lady Briar-Dasmius dove like quicksilver under the savage cuts, her own slim blades moving so fast they left glittering arcs in the sunlight. Joined in a deadly dance the pair moved and ducked, feet and elbows as much weapons as the slender daggers that flittered and whined. Each managed to slip cuts through onto the other but neither able to land a telling blow until Nerys, throwing herself to the floor and all but at the feet of her enemy at the same time flung one of her blades upwards, sinking it hilt deep into the jaw of her foe-woman and burying the point in her brain. Standing wearily the Lady Nerys bent, tugged free her blade, and returned to the fray with but a simple shake of her head at the waste of a life and the foolishness of the traitor.

Above the battle a knot of demons was burst asunder by a writhing blast of thorns as a green tinged metallic dragon flew through them and then banked up and into attack. It slipped and turned on one wing as it wove through storms of arrows and blasts of energy thrown by the demons, an indomitable arrow that swept the skies and with titanic blasts of power vaporised demons or with swats of its metal limbs reduced the skulls of immature demon-dragons to so much pulp.

"The Death of a King"

The legions of Calsmeer held the centre, but even the wall of men and their drilled training was crumbling in the face of the ceaseless sea of the enemy. Orcs and forsworn men crashing into the braced shields of Calsmeer were slowly but surely buckling the line and each man of the wolf lost was another winnowing of the strength of the wall. In the places they were breached the tides of the darkness rushed into the gaps to widen them.

At this moment, a great and deep horn sounded from the western flank, a long drawn out note that echoed round and round the plain. Then there came a sound that unlike the charge of Calsmeer which was a rippling thunder, instead this shook the ground itself and sounded more like the crashing avalanche of the high Gralamire mountains.

A wall of steel twelve feet high swept across the front of our lines, like the sweep of a cart running down a stray dog the trolls thundered down the battle line mounted on barded mammoths and rode down the front ranks of the enemy. At their head the hammer of King Sourbelly burst the skulls of the dark-lovers like over-ripened fruit. At his left side his high Priest Stormclaw and at his right his sister Brightstar. The corridor of space they brought allowed the belaboured legions time to regroup and reform their lines. The enemy caught behind it were swarmed and cut down with the brutal and calm efficiency that made the legions the formidable fighting force they are. Ground was given as they fell back, fresh centuries of men coming to the fore giving others the time to grab longed for water and bandage dripping wounds.

A great shadow fell over the column of trolls from above, and a terrifying screech made men's hearts quail and weak knees collapse. A sweep of wind preceded the passage of the largest Shadow Dragon yet seen as it stooped, folding back wings into a missile of black and unfathomable death that sped like a javelin to strike the King of the Trolls. The impact threw him from his mount, breaking the neck of his beast and scattering his guard like chaff. The dragon furrowed the soil with its claws as the young King of the Trolls hauled himself to his feet. His shield arm hanging at his side in mute testament to the force of the blow and his head shaking to clear the dizzying waves that must have assaulted it. This noble newcomer to the fold of Varan monarchs fought his way to his feet and lifted his hammer with that crushing finality that comes when a man knows he has met his fate, that he will fight one last time because his spirit cannot in conscience step into the night without refusing to yield one last time. His arm had freed his people from the yoke of the Shadowlings, had forged an army ready to stand against the darkness without any mercy offered. He stood and with no words but only the monolith of his stance, dared the dragon to face him.

The beast charged, chunks of earth the size of anvils thrown out behind it as its claws dug deep for grip, the maw wide and ready to rend the armour of the king to so much waste scrap. Even as it closed the mighty arm of Sourbelly pulled back that hammer, shield turned towards the onrushing titan of shadow even though the broken arm behind could not brace it for the impact. A wide and slow cast of the hammer's head swung it at the full extend of the corded arm that held it, a half circle that put all the king's weight and that of his coat of steel to bear on the six inch square of the face

of the hammer, a battering ram of scarred metal that landed on the side of the Dragon's jaw. Nothing that walks on this earth should have deflected the mammoth bulk of the dragon, but the blow landed and turned its course wildly away, the sickening crunch of snapping bone counterpointed by the ear-torturing screech of rent metal. A bright spray of crimson flowed from a shattered breastplate as Sourbelly staggered back, one of his knees giving under him as his shield fell unheeded into the churned dust of Mara. Opened to the bone and with his life spraying out the king brought his hammer up from the floor, up and over his shoulder with his arm straight as he wound it up, continuing down and following it through to again smash it into the broken jaw of the beast that lay near him. The scream of agony from the dragon was a pathetic mewl in the face of the stoic silence of the mortally wounded king. Figures raced for him desperately from where they had been thrown but the adamant hard claw of the dragon found him before aid and transfixed Sourbelly through the rent in his armour, emerging from his back as it drove him to the floor and pinned him to it.

Stormclaw and Brightstar lead the charge and beside them came the flaming blade of the high king, come to the aid of his brother monarch. From the lines of the legions burst the Baron of Navarre with a contingent of other warriors; Kiall of the Silver Swords, Delores emissary of Clan Yannash with her own hammer seeking vengeance for the fallen Troll and a warrior woman of Gralamire whose hands held a twin pair of blades that glimmered like the soft light of the dawn. Elves and men and dwarves, racing the trolls to save this valiantly fallen king from the indignity that the enemy would heap on his body if they could take it.

The dragon rose again, jaw hanging crooked and teeth splintered in their sockets. Rose and turned like a fox at bay as the High Priest of Bronwen for the trolls rattled off incantation after incantation to shield himself and the others. Rose and beheld the spear of Brightstar enshrouded in lightning and revealed as the most sacred relic of the Faith of the warrior goddess. Rose and tried to breath balefire at them as it reared, only to stiffen in spasm as the Spear maiden impaled it's chest with the arcing point of the Storm spear and drove it half its length into the breast of the dragon and deep into it's blackened heart.

The tail thrashed wildly, and the scream of agony was drowned by the howl of the Princess of the Trolls as she unleashed the full fury of the spear and tore it from the body of the beast. The broken-jawed head levelled at her and there was a faintest warning of the shoulders hunching, enough for Stormclaw to throw himself bodily before the princess as the beast belched forth a torrent of roiling black flame. A bright blue glow enshrouded him as the energy licked at his grimly smiling face and with that Brightstar drew back the haft of her spear and thrust it deep into the braincase of the dragon and out the other side.

Even as the beast dropped the skies darkened more as wing after wing of demon dragons and shadow dragons filled the skies above us, bringing an odd half-light to the scene below as Brightstar cradled the head of her brother on her lap; there on the field of Mara did the great king of the Trolls, who brought them freedom and into the fold of the arms of the Varan nations, left that gift to us all as his legacy as he drew in his last shuddering breath.

"The Stand at the Foinaven Dragon"

In the skies the furious battle between the flying priests and the metallic dragon against the demon and shadow dragons had become a chaotic mess of swirling bodies. While from the west more and more dragons from the Dralazar Weyr were arriving and joining the fight, the Metallic dragon was seemingly more and more fatigued, having fought for well over an hour almost alone against the sweeping horde of the enemy's dragons.

Finally it was simply overwhelmed, and a crashing impact with a demon dragon that threw itself in a death dive at it battered the valiant construct to the ground on the Eastern flank. Sunk into the ground by the force of the impact it was beyond belief when a hatchway opened in the fallen creature's chest and from inside staggered a Treewalker who had on her brow another of the silver fillets, this one resting under a bronze and gold wreath of leaves. Holding her up and resting her weight on a wrapped banner was a human woman. Both of them looked drawn and tired, legs barley supporting them as they moved a little way from their fallen mount and then unfurled the banner. The blazon on the standard instantly proclaimed them to the Calsmeerians as the Marquesa Sylvana of Foinaven. Before them from the enemy lines came a formation of traitor trolls, huge blades drawn and door shields ready. From above the Dragon that had brought them low again dived, but wave after wave of arrows from a contingent of Northern Calsmeerian archers on the flank, who turned in place as one at the sight of the endangered pair, swept the skies clear above them by riddling the diving horror with enough arrows to turn it into a pin-cushion.

Two stood alone, a wall of muscle and meat oncoming as no relief could be spared for them now, none bar a group of irregulars and the high king. Carnak sped to the defence of those who had brought aid to the army, and with him came others from that northern settlement. Utgard the Druid, Uushki, his crossbow rattling a fast as he could load it on the run and fire, Baron Storel of Navarre with the emblem of the Legion of Battle proudly on his shield, the Lizardman Jakari and the Frost-mane warrior maiden Silverfrost. With but scant breaths they reached the fallen metal dragon and the riders, in a heartbeat they formed line and braced to meet the trolls.

Uushki slung his crossbow and ducking under the first troll's swing he rammed his sword into the pit of its arm. At the same time Silverfrost parried up the sword of the second and slipped her second blade between its shield and body to gut the turncoat. Carnak flared into a living flame and in his hands the sword of the high king became a brand that

seared past shield and armour to roast flesh and leave bodies in his wake. Utgard fell back and tended to the weakened riders, urgent flicks of her hands sending blasts of wind to throw any that got past the line back into the savage melee that raged no more than a cart's length from them. Storel worked efficiently, his shield sweeping aside weapons and his sword slicing deep into troll flesh as he ran through any and all who came near him. Jakari was a calm locus in the writhing mass of steel and body, a hand reaching out almost lazily now and then, his touch dropping any that seemed about to reach the backs of the warriors and strike from behind. The whole flow of the fight seemed equal, none making ground, but then there was a teeth jarring whine of noise as the banner bearing woman planted the standard in the earth at the side of Utgard, and drew a slim blade from her hip. Sylvana also rose and seemingly less tired she pulled her own pale Ironwood blade from its sheath and together they joined the melee. With the introduction of the Treewalker warrior and the woman I learned later to be the King's Bard of Calsmeer the trolls stood no chance; Sylvana deflected the sword of the first troll stupid enough to face her up and over her head, her foot coming off the floor and kicking it with enough force to shatter it's back in one blow leaving it on the ground writhing and squealing in pain.

Arwenna, chosen Bard of Robert Pedrianly was less forceful, but elegant and swift. Clad in no armour but instead a modest dress trimmed with gold, weapons seemed unable to hurt her despite her seeming vulnerability. Where the Treewalker hammered to the floor with force she brought low with hamstringing and cuts that left the recipient desperately trying to stem the flow of blood from opened arteries. Her slim weapon shearing chainmail apart like it were knitted wool.

"The Rear-Guard Weakens"

Despite this knot of combat, the eastern flank was crumbling in places; Wyldmen broke past the lines and ranged out for the baggage train, only to find again the innocent and weak were protected by adventurers come to the field of battle to stand with the light against the forces of Evil. Screams of panic from the camp followers turned to cheers as the emissary Delores of the Dwarven house of Uberwalen flung Wyldman after Wyldman back from the helpless with wide swings of her hammer. Beside her two commoners stood, one a Skywise who danced merrily between the be-furred barbarians and left swift and deadly cuts in their flesh with her light daggers, the other companion Thornton merely slapped a Wyldman across the face with his riding crop making the brute stop, turn and attacked his fellows instead. Behind them the Newfolk Myst shepherded those in danger away from the fight stopping only to lift a trampled child and with a few light touches of her silvery grey hands heal the child and hand her to a distraught mother with the child wild eyed but unhurt. Further up the line the Silver-Sword mercenary Kiall stood against the brunt of eight Wyldmen alone, his long-blade like a scythe carving respite for those behind him as he shrugged off blow after blow from warriors seven foot tall and simply laughed back and then answered with a fist that shattered bone and pulped flesh. Behind him a mage in blue robes rooted strays to the spot with spells while the injured from the camp hospital commandeered bows and simple peppered the held men until they collapsed.

"The Stand of the Red Falcons"

On the hill above stood the monarchs, only a low berm isolating them from the back of the lines, that and a good distance of the slope. However this was not enough, and from behind a flanking force of Beastmen suddenly charged the camp, placing the very heart of the five kingdoms at risk. Fortunately the monarchs were protected by the men and women of the Red Falcons, who rushed to ensure a disaster could not occur. However something drove these Beastmen into fervour as before unseen, and despite the shining skill of the thin line of red velvet and steel that stood against them a knot of bear-men and badger-men managed to plough past and into the main compound. The gap behind them was closed suddenly by a volley of fireballs that came from the hands of Lord Kieran Summoner, who stepped into the breach and held it alone for perilous moments, on his brow another of these silver circlets that seemed to be everywhere in the battle. Held it at the cost of deep wounds until he was joined by Shamizel of Dralazar and his pages who unleashed a blaze of light into the eyes of the Beastmen long enough to drag back the Baron and let the Falcons redeploy into the gap.

Even as they did a volley of arrows arced in towards the delicate Queen of Erinan, yet with a swirl of crimson suddenly in front of her, shielding her with his own body was her new husband the Red Falcon Datalno De'Celtar. His arms up and covering his face, arrows whined and whickered as they skipped off his silver bright steel breastplate and bracers, however still more sank with crushing finality into his flesh or punched through the steel leaving him riddled with flighted shafts.

He sank back, falling to his knee then to the floor, his royal wife bending over him desperately.

The Beastmen in the camp ran for them, a fervour in their eyes that was beyond description. In their way there came the Red Falcon Altos, strong and indomitable with twin rapiers in his hands that engaged five of them and in swift flowing movements he ran through one, punched a hilt into the face of a second as he simultaneously slid the other into the throat of a third. Turning he opened the forth from navel to gut with a powerful swing, driven by his sturdy frame, however the last managed to power a massive overhead swing at the knight, who crossed his blades and took

the impact but was driven to one knee; like lightning he freed one rapier and took the Bearman through the heart only to be pinned by it's dead weight as it collapsed on top of him.

The reduced interlopers closed the distance between the kneeling queen and themselves only to be met by a second man in steel and crimson; this time the man had a slight build and looked more suited to a scribe than a knight. His sword held point down he spoke rapidly and gestured again and again at the Beastmen and nearly half of them turned, glazed-eyed and fell on their fellows. Even so four of them came on, and though the man moved with the smooth steely grace of a man who lives by the sword, wounding several, the power and mass of the Badger and Bearmen drove him back and under leaving him lying on the floor with blood trickling from his scalp.

A female troll in a red dress with a silver bodice stood near the Queen, alone against the oncoming group, when a cart came careening from one side, driven by a man with eyes wide in terror as at his side was third Red Falcon with his hair held back by a bright cloth and his waist encircled by sashes that almost but not quite clashed with his cloak. He fired a crossbow and dropped one of the Badgermen, while the others were forced to desperately halt their run or be mown down by the cart, as it passed the knight grabbed a short rope hanging from the headboard upright, and swinging away from the driving bench he arced out into the air, one hand flinging daggers that sank hilt-deep into the remaining Beastmen, he landed and rolled, coming to his feet with an easy grin and his blade in his hand. He laughed, took two mocking dance steps towards the largest Badgerman and slammed the basket of his sword into it's face; there was a cracking blast as something detonated enveloping the closest Beastmen in a flare of energy and the Badgerman was left standing with the lower half of his face blown off, others swaying in shock at the attack. The knight turned, and with a polite comment slammed the toes of his boot into the crotch of one of the two Bearmen still standing. As the creature folded over he grabbed it by the scruff of the neck and holding it an moment he dispatched it with a brutally efficient thrust down through it's back and into the heart.

Leaving the melee the only remaining Bearman pounded for the Queen, only one obstacle in his way in the form of the Queen's trollish handmaiden. The troll crouched a second, then drew a sabre so massive that its length was the height of a man and was thicker edge to edge than most broadswords. Dropping into a duellist's trained stance she swept the blade up and round as if it were nothing in weight. The Bearman turned, taking the impact on one shoulder and though wounded he grabbed the troll's wrist and with his other claw hammered his fist into her shoulder. There was a sickening crunch and the Troll dropped in screaming agony.

Nothing protected the Queen now, as the staggering Bearman closed the last distance to her in weary but deadly strides. It raised one claw high, ready to strike like the inevitable fall of night at the end of the day, raised it as he stepped to within his arms length, raised it as the Queen turned, rising from her crouch beside her fallen husband. As she rose she had a look in her eyes that spoke nothing of the perceived distant Queen of Erinan and everything of a woman who loved fiercely and wept openly for the man fallen at her feet in her defence. Rose and dropped one hand behind her with the elbow bent. Rose, and with her other hand thrust Datalno's rapier forwards and through the chest of the Bearman transfixing its heart, her body a perfect focused base for this single thrust that showed years of study behind it.

The Bearman dropped, and the queen knelt and kissed her husband's lips once as healers rushed to him, then she turned and moved towards the holding line of her Knights, her handmaid falling into step beside her with her shattered arm tucked into her belt and the massive sabre held in her left hand. The trio of Palthos, Aramand and Altos formed on her as the young Queen Elenora of Erinan stepped to stand on the line with her knights and join them in personal refutation of the dark and its servants.

"The Darkling Lord Appears"

As the Battle built, dissolving more and more into a heaving mass of men and beasts and less and less a factor of tactics there came a horrifying sight. Wading chest and shoulders above the rest through the troops of the dark came the Shadowling lord. We beheld him and all the rumours of the Shadowlings being gone were suddenly felt false; we feared the coming of this tide of the old and greatest enemy. Clad in dark iron armour and holding a massive greatsword a stillness seemed to envelop the field as the armies drew back to see what would be decided by the coming of the ultimate leader of this fell army.

From our lines stepped forwards Carnak, about him arrayed many notable or simply brave men and women of Vara. For Calsmeer stood Lady Nerys Briar-Dasmusius, Baron Storel of Navarre, Utgard VorOni, Uushki Mag and Ashym. For the Dwarves stood Delores of House Uberwalen, for Gralamire came Silverfrost. Others of no fixed land stood as well, Myst and Jakari, Thornton and Sherbet, Kiall, Honeysuckle the Newfolk and Tellor the Mage.

The Darkling Lord threw off his helm and in a moment he revealed himself to be something different than expected: An elf of ancient providence whose hair seemed to shift through the spectrum of colours as the light moved across it and whose skin also seemed to shift in hue subtly as time passed. He yelled in fury at the High King and strode to the attack. The other in reply simply moved forwards to engage him with the weary reluctance of those who fight because

it is what they must do. The Lady Nerys stopping only a second to call a banner out of the air to her, planting it firmly in the ground to display the standard of her Order, that of the Broken Sword, and then joining the fray. The fight was brutal, for the Fell lord of the dark was mighty indeed and he laid about him in fury; Kiall was smashed back by a blow that seemed impossible to survive, let alone to take and rise to one's feet to fight again. Storel had a leg sheared from his body, yet after only a short pause to seal the wound was seen to rejoin the battle with but one leg and the support of his fellows. Nerys threw daggers then drew a sword and cladding it in soft light attacked in her inimitable ducking and weaving style. Uushki slid his strange metal blade into the flesh of the enemy, and for his pains received a wound that left him on the floor gasping for his last breath, only to be saved by the almost instant healing of Myst, who was now clad in glowing armour. Bones were broken, and bodies were riven, yet still the Darkling lord stood. Baron Storel threw himself at the creature again and was struck down once more, lying broken on the floor unmoving as the fight moved away. Utgard knelt over him for a moment then turned, fury in her eyes as the normally calm druid charged the Darkling Lord, her diminutive frame topped with a banner of raven black hair came at him, even as his massive blade came round in anticipation of her like the tides irresistible flow. The blade began its lethal arc and just before the moment when nothing other than Utgard being sheared in twain would have happened, Ashym, now a tall and terrible wolf-man, hammered a fist into the side of the Darkling Lord's head and threw him to the side.

There was a pause, and the Darkling Lord yelled a challenge to the high king, for Carnak to face him alone and if he lost to quit Vara forever; if the High King won then the Darkling Lord would renounce his claim on the land. Many voices cried out that this was not to be allowed, that too much rested on this. Others upheld the challenge as Carnak stepped forth, once more clad in his form of fire and with the sword of Kiral also transfigured; a living light to beat back the darkness of evil.

The Darkling Lord showed his foul treachery by attacking others who stood about, before Carnak ordered them away, and unleashed a volley of fireballs that forced the Shadowling Lord back and staggered him to one knee. Carnak ran in and laid about this most hated foe with blow after blow intent on allowing him not to rise. However the enemy struggled to his feet, towering over the High King. In the minds of every person watching who knew their lore, visions of the Jenia's valiant death at Mara four centuries before began to play. A terrible warning that victory might cost us the High King still.

But this fear was not to be, for Carnak drew in a deep breath, and sprang to one final assault; weapons snarled and crashed in the lengthening light and in brief moments the Darkling Lord was cast to the ground and did not try to rise; Carnak raised his blade and with the steady rhythm of a man who knows something must be done he severed the head from the body. Then with utmost care he laid out his enemy at rest, showing that even in a battle such as this mercy and respect can be offered. That even an implacable a foe as the one that sought the death of everyone on the face of the land can be honoured and made equal in mourning.

"Battle's End"

A terrible howl went up from the army of the darkness, as we all, thousands of men, elves, dwarves, trolls, Halflings, and many others raised our weapons high and cheered. Cheered for joy at simply living, cheered for courage that had seen us through, cheered for the hearts of our High king and those that had faced the Darkling Lord when the rest of us quailed in fear, cheered hardest and longest for all those that had come here only to fall, and who had died in the long years of strife leading to this day that had been engendered at the behest of the now vanquished foe.

We stood a moment, watching the angling rays of the evening sun glint off the weapons and armour of our heroes, at the shine of the Circlets some of them bore and then we turned as one our attention to the army of the darkness. We turned our eyes, and then began to advance, tiredly but gaining speed as they fell back, fell back, and then turned and ran from us. With the sun to our side and the wind at our backs, with the skies clear of all bar the swift wings of the Dragons of Dralazar we chased them scattering them forever and leaving Mara a place of glory and sorrow.

I write these words and know they can never capture that moment fully, that no-one who did not stand on that soil and see these things can know truly what that day meant and how it changed us all. I do know this, every freedom we have now was bought at the price of many lives, was bought in blood and courage and fear. To you, who reads this, never forget those who paid that price for you and never take the gift they have given you lightly.

The Calendar of Vara

The Varan week is made up of seven days each 24 hours long.

- ❖ *MornDay (Morning day or Mourning day as you have to get up all the earlier after resting on Songday)*
- ❖ *Tithes-Day (traditionally when the workers presented the Tithes to the Landowners or local Lord and to the churches)*
- ❖ *Wednesday*
- ❖ *Thor's-day (named after a hero of Bronwenian legend)*
- ❖ *Fry-Day (traditionally a light fried evening meal, using up any leftovers from the week in an omelette style thing)*
- ❖ *[Sheep] Herds-day (the traditional market day, where herds are driven to market)*
- ❖ *Song-Day (literally the day to rest, dance and sing; also used by many religions as a day of reverence)*

Month names (the month lengths are the same as in real life).

- *Jonever*
- *February*
- *March (as the weather finally changes enough for armies to march efficiently)*
- *Astril (for the star that heralds the seasons turn)*
- *Mai*
- *Yune*
- *July*
- *Augustus*
- *Septander*
- *Octander*
- *Novander*
- *Decander*

The Year is also as long as in real life.

Celebrations of the Varan Year

Jonever

Thinveil – starting at midnight the night before for the Priests, this is a celebration of the Church of Neroz, held on the 1st Jonever.

February

March

The Returning to the Earth – held on the third new moon after the turn of the year, this celebration of Ash'i'el usually falls in March.

Astril

The Festival of Life – as the star for which this month is named moves through the sky, so the first signs of spring arrive, and the Church of Osrose holds this celebration.

Mai

The Revel of the Goddess – with spring well under way the Church of Shashay celebrates its main festival, the Revel of the Goddess.

Yune

The Day of Balance – held at Midsummer, the Church of Starsha holds the Day of Balance. A day of contemplation, and for some, the start of a year of silence.

July

The Festival of Light – held on the 15th of the month, this celebration of the Church of Lanokash is a feast of stories and song and dance.

The Gathering for the Departed – this is a celebration of the Treewalker Elves, held on the 16th of the month, when they feast and remember those who have departed from life in the last year.

Augustus

Clarion Tournament – on the first weekend of this month, Clarion in Calsmeer holds its annual tournament in which people come from all over Vara to test their skills, and the Guilds compete for new members.

The Ascension of Liren – Held on the 8th of the month this date marks when the Goddess Liren was restored.

The Anniversary of the Battle of Mara – the 10th of the month marks this anniversary of both the 2nd and 3rd Battles of Mara in which the forces of Vara stood against the forces of Evil.

Septander

Troll Day of Remembrance – on the 1st of the month, the people of the Troll nation gather to mark the anniversary of the funeral of Sourbelly, the King who bought them freedom and gave his life at the battle of Mara.

Octander

Legion Day in Calsmeer – 14th of the month, a remembrance of the sacrifice of the Legions and the families left behind.

The Day of Welcoming – 15th Octander, this is the day when initiates of the Liren Faith may take their final vows and enter the ranks of the church preachers.

Balemort – on the 31st of the month, the Church of Neroz holds the rite in which the Avatar is chosen for the next year, after which there is a feast for all followers of the God of Death.

Novander

Decander

Lover's Night – On midwinter, the Church of Shashay once again revel in the flesh, holding the second of their yearly celebrations.

The Feast of Heroes – Also on midwinter, the Church of Bronwen light up the longest night with feasting and tales of great heroes and deeds past, remembering those who have fallen in the last year.

Law, Crime & Punishment

Differences of social classes in Law

High Law: If they CAN be prosecuted, tend to get the softer side of things, or a lighter sentence than normally possible (depending on their rank) or just exile.

Common Law: Tend to get the harsher end of the ranges.

Outlaw: Anyone declared an outlaw has no protection under any law, as such nothing done to them is considered to be a crime (there are one or two exceptions to this based of the moral repugnance of the act).

Monster Law: Certain races are deemed to be Outlaws by default (tend not to be PC races). It IS possible to petition to be taken as 'within the law' and such people are given a distinctive crest to bear and a writ of legality to present if needed.

Who may administer Law to Whom?

High King: To other rulers and all others below him.

Council of rulers: To all other rulers/monarchs as a group (Only by common consent and ability to enforce said judgements). In times past the High King would sit in judgement, but while the line was lost, the council took on this task. Now he has returned this has passed back to him in order to help keep the balance of power.

Monarch: To all subjects in kingdom.

High Nobles: To Low Nobles and Commoners (High Nobles would usually be tried by the King but groups of High Nobles can try other High Nobles).

Low Nobles: To Commoners and when in groups to other Low Nobles.

Commoners: To none, although mob justice or a council of elders may try and enforce law themselves, nobility can always countermand this. Mob justice tends to be frowned upon by nobility.

The Ranks of Nobility

As it might be of use, here are the Nobility ranks, from highest to lowest, for Vara.

Please note that due to the High Kingship all of these ranks are used in all kingdoms. While there may be some regional versions of names, in regard to the Guild of Bards & Herald's a nobility rank will be one of these.

Monarch

King (Queen)

High Nobles

Lord (Lady)

Marquis (Marquesa)

Baron (Baroness)

Duke (Duchess)

Low Nobles

Earl (Contessa)

Viscount (Viscountess)

Count (Countess)

[Knight (Lady Knight)] Not in the rank so much as equal to a count in terms of being able to dispense justice. When addressing them the honorific is "Sir" and "Chevalier"

Squire (Esquire)

Note that in Vara men and women of the same rank are treated as equals and it is common to find a woman holding a title when her husband may not (and he is simply addressed by the title by extension of his wife's rank).

Exceptions.

Knights are equivalent to Low Nobles who can dispense justice to Commoners only.

Nobles can form a militia/guard for keeping order.

The Law of Inheritance

Inheritance has some variations country by country, however the main laws are that wives inherit the holdings and control of titles from dead husbands (or vice versa), with the eldest child of the deceased person's gender then inheriting the title (if applicable). It is entirely possible for a mother and son to be "Lady and Lord", for clarity in such cases the prefix of "Dowager" is added to the title. However this is never applied to a monarch, in such cases the son remains a Prince until such time as the Queen abdicates or passes.

Knight titles are not inherited, as they have to be earned, however it is common for families to follow in the footsteps of their forebears.

Where there is no surviving spouse, the title will first pass to the eldest child, unless another heir had been named. After that it either passes to the closest blood relative, or back to the crown that granted it in the event of no close blood relative remaining or if the grant of title/land was limited to the holder only when given.

Normally there is a waiting period of at least two weeks before inheritance is formally ratified, this is to allow for the chance of resurrection, and for other claimants to come forwards to state their cases.

Some countries will allow elder bastard children that can prove their lineage to claim inheritance over younger recognised siblings, while others will only allow the recognised children to inherit. A noble may formally disinherit offspring or close relations either by decree, or record this in their will, they can also return the right of inheritance at any time by the same measures.

All goods and property normally pass to the inheritor, however it is considered very poor form to not make provision for one's siblings without god cause.

In very rare cases, a person may formally pass on inheritance before their death, though they tend to retain an advisory role, and some small parcel of estate and holdings to provide for themselves. Once this is done it is very hard to reclaim legal control outside of the death of the inheritor without an heir. Cases such as this are more common if the person intends to take holy orders for a cloistered lifestyle, or if they wish to retain family honour if convicted of a serious crime, though the crown may revoke their rights under inheritance law and reclaim the title, holdings and lands for the crown.

Weapon Laws

In settlements of large village size and upwards, it is common to find that the gate-watch will relieve those entering of their weapons unless a fee is paid.

When the fee is paid, a wooden chit is given to the person to show how much they have paid, and half the fee is returned on handing in the chit when you leave the settlement. (Some thieves tend to try to steal the chit, and get the cash for it.)

If you instead hand in your weapon you are given a different Chit, which allows you to reclaim your weapon on leaving the settlement. (Again these are worth stealing as the thief can then claim the weapon.)

While the toll may vary, the following is about standard, a dagger is normally an eating & utility tool, and as such is not tolled:

Dagger: if COMBAT only	10 G	Bow:	40 G
1 Handed Weapon:	30 G	Mage Staff:	100 G
2 Handed Weapon:	60 G	Wand:	100 G
Great-Weapon:	200 G	Magic Weapons:	+100 %

Adventuring Parties with a Letter of Marque in the Kingdom it relates to will be exempt from such charges, as will Knights and Nobles (they are expected to dispense Law and follow it, so they should not be starting any fights without just cause). Also a Noble can extend their own right to their personal guard (who MUST be in livery) however it is considered a mark of good for to instead pay for them unless there is a pressing matter.

A local noble can increase the weapons tax in order to help raise funds, but they cannot lower it. In times of great danger the laws can be rescinded. The guard have the right at any time to remove the right to carry a weapon from someone who has paid and instead give them a chit. Those exempt from Weapons Tax however always retain the right to carry.

Trial by Combat

In cases where there is a potential of the death penalty, a person may feel that a trial by Judge or Jury will be biased, in such cases a person might risk throwing the final judgement into the hands of the Gods by asking for Trial by Combat. Any person accused may ask for it but it must be requested before verdict has been given.

Champions may be used but there will be a set period for a champion to be presented, in return the court can appoint a champion for the cause of the law.

All such combats are to the death, however resurrection is only denied to the accused, as if they lose the fight it is assumed their guilt has been proven and that sentence has been carried out.

All combats allow only martial attacks, spell based attacks are forbidden and no pure weapons may be used. In the case of the accused only owning a pure weapon, then the law must provide a mundane replacement of reasonable quality. It is traditionally accepted that unless any powers of transportation are found on weapons or armour, the accused will be allowed free use of their own gear for the fight, and will be set free with all possessions they held at the time of their capture should they prove their case with force of arms.

It should be noted however that the patron of such combats is Bronwen, in her aspect of fairness, and also that the gods can and do interfere in such combats if they choose to in order to enforce the true guilt or innocence of the accused.

The Dispensing of Law

A criminal can be subject to two slightly different processes of law, depending on who is passing judgement.

If they are being tried by a group of peers, then the accused and other important parties are questioned and the jury will come back with a group decision as to guilt or innocence and the punishment to be applied. Groups cannot employ the use of truth spells as part of the trial as only the person casting the spell can be certain of the veracity of the spells result, not all parties involved.

If they are being tried by a single person with the rank and right to dispense justice to them then truth spells can be employed by the person dispensing law, as they can be entirely sure of the veracity of the spell. After all parties have been questioned the dispenser of law will deliver the verdict (sometimes after a period of deliberation).

Trials are not a modern system of citing of precedents, though past rulings can be used as a guide in what punishment might be fitting. Instead it is a case of explaining actions and presenting statements and evidence in the form of structured debate; one can hire a professional representative (or in Calsmeer have a Dalaigh represent you) or you can represent yourself if no one is willing to speak for you. Either the jury or the person in judgement can ask questions directly if they wish to.

At no time can Communication spells be used to ascertain guilt, innocence or truth of statements; while a priest can sit in judgement if he has the legal and rank authority to do so, he cannot rule based on his faith.

The Guard have authority to dispense justice in the name of the local noble they are employed by and only within the lands belonging to that noble. However most of the time they will deal with commoners; anyone of higher rank will be arrested and held to see either the noble or a more senior member of his staff charged with passing judgement in his name. Nobility can demand a trial by the noble himself or at least a group of peers rather than being tried by the noble's 'Justice of the Peace'. However such Justices of the Peace frequently have a lower rank themselves to help deal with such situations.

The Guard can arrest anyone in regard to a crime, remove their weapons and items, and hold them. Arrest is not a suspicion of guilt but a clear statement that the person is bound under law until the matter is resolved. The guard can question if needed to help clear the matter up, mainly to eliminate the person from the investigation so they can be released from arrest to go about their business.

The Guard have powers to stop and search if they deem fit, partly to enable them to check for weapons without permission to carry granted for them in the form of a chit. Resisting arrest is a serious matter, as is assault on the guard. It should be noted that the guard answer to the local noble and their representatives, or higher crown authority with a reason to intervene. They do not have to explain themselves or deliver a list of charges on arrest unless they choose to.

It is expected that citizens of Vara will not impeded the Guard in their duties, and if asked will assist them in the task; this is not licence to take the law into your own hands, but does allow such things as restraining a criminal for arrest. However if you take action without cause you may find yourself on the receiving end of an assault charge.

It should be noted that the Kiral Guard, under the auspice of the High King, can dispense justice anywhere in the lands of Vara under the Law of the High King. However they will normally hand investigations and criminals over to local crown justice to help enforce their position of neutrality. The Great Roads (and the Enclaves on them) are taken as High King's land where they are the local crown authority.

Crimes and their punishments.

Regenticide: Public execution (possibly torture first).

High Treason (Crime against the High King or Vara as a whole): Public execution (possibly torture first), in exceptional cases permanent exile from Vara as a whole (on pain of death) may be applied instead.

Treason (Crime against the Crown head of a country or the country as a whole): Public execution (possibly torture first), in rare cases exile from the kingdom as a whole on pain of death or life in prison may be considered instead.

Pre-Meditated Murder: Death or hard labour for life.

Manslaughter: Hard labour sentence.

Rape: Branding (and possible castration).

Grand theft: Prison sentence, with hobbling for repeat offenders.

Petty Theft: 1st offence a fine, 2nd offence prison, 3rd offence lose 1 hand, 4th offence lose other hand.

Aggravated Assault: Public flogging, 30+ Strokes.

Assault: Public flogging or fine.

Arson: Fine and public flogging.

Poaching: Loss of bow fingers and short prison term.

Slavery: Short term hard labour 1st offence, 2nd hard labour for life.

Selling/Making Poison: Depends on the strength of poison found on the person. 1 year plus 1 year for every level of poison carried (total all levels). Death poison means 50 years in prison. Note: Penalty is for possession of the actual poisons, not having the recipe. Possession of recipes is a fine equal to the cost of the recipes.

Other Illegal substances: Prison or high fine.

Resisting Arrest: High fine (400 G +).

Attempting to Escape Arrest: Public flogging, 30+ Strokes.

Aiding in the escape of a prisoner: Public flogging, 30+ Strokes.

Assisting others in attempting to escape arrest: Public flogging, 20 + Strokes.

Assault on the Guard: Public Flogging, 40+ Strokes, and being declared an outlaw in the area the Guard is responsible for.

Tax Evasion: Fine and prison labour to pay off both debt and fine if unable to pay in cash.

Being declared Scofflaw/Outlaw: Loss of all protections in Law (Note that rape against an outlaw is still normally punished as a crime, mainly due to the moral repugnance of the act). You will normally be arrested on attempting entry to any settlement and questioned as to why you are there. You are never allowed to pay to carry a weapon inside a settlement. You will normally be relieved of your magical items (to be returned on exit) and if it is possible to tell if you have any limited duration magical effects active, you will be held until they expire. Any spell-casting inside town could lead to your arrest again no matter what the nature of the casting.

Sentences can be mitigated by the court; this can include such things as commuting flogging strokes to fines (number of commuted strokes at court's discretion). However the prisoner cannot choose to take the flogging instead as this is more about the court being seen to be merciful to the general populace.

Such leniency will be made at a normal minimum of 150 Guilder per stroke.

To remove the status of 'Outlaw' you will need to petition the ranking authority. Generally this will be the court or noble for the area you are Outlaw within; you can also petition the crown for a pardon however it should be noted that you will need to prove your commitment to society, that you have turned away from the path that lead to you being outlawed, and probably will need witnesses to speak to your good character. If you are able to prove you were not guilty of the crime in the first place the status can be removed.

Occasionally an act of great personal sacrifice and/or service to the crown has resulted in a full pardon and removal of Outlaw status. It should be noted that if you are declared outlaw as part of a sentence, when the sentence is finished you remain an outlaw.

A Note on Bounties

Bounties may be placed on people not only for crimes, but also for running away from debts, to protect them and have them delivered to a particular place, to bring them in for questioning, or a host of other things.

Bounties are normally administered through the Legion of Battle or the local Guard. These organisations will affirm the right person (or evidence) has been presented, funds are paid, and a record of the person bringing in the bounty is made. They also set up the initial bounties and will help determine the level and limits of the bounty. There are formal and informal bounty hunter groups, but these groups for the most part help to bring in the bounty rather than administer payment. Bounty hunters tend towards the professional hard-bitten lot. They walk a fine line making sure that they do not break the law they exist to support. They are sometimes also commissioned to transport criminals from out of the way places to more major settlements for trial.

Currency, Weights and Distances

Currency

<u>Description</u>	<u>Value</u>
<i>Tiny Light Green Pyramid</i>	<i>1 Guilder</i>
<i>Small Red Pyramid</i>	<i>3 Guilder</i>
<i>Small Grey Cones</i>	<i>5 Guilder</i>
<i>Small Grey Pyramid</i>	<i>10 Guilder</i>
<i>Yellow Cone</i>	<i>25 Guilder</i>
<i>Small Light Green Pyramid</i>	<i>50 Guilder</i>
<i>Small Green Cones</i>	<i>100 Guilder</i>
<i>Yellow Pyramid</i>	<i>250 Guilder</i>
<i>Large Grey Pyramid</i>	<i>1000 Guilder</i>
<i>Pink Pyramid</i>	<i>5000 Guilder</i>

The Currency of Vara is the Guilder. Guilders are made from semi-precious stones that are cut to a set shape and size. Stones are used rather than metal coins as stone cannot be shaved or melted down. If you have the stone and tools, you can indeed make your own currency. This has led to a very stable economy and no need for any kind of exchange rate. (Also it makes the very purse a thief may try to steal into a very good weapon for beating them off with if the pouch is strong enough).

All money taken on an adventure by a player will be issued to them by the Ref. on the day and any remaining or found on the adventure is to be returned to the Ref. at the end of the adventure. The system only has a limited supply of the coins so please take care of them while they are in your possession.

Each character has a section of their Battle Board on which is recorded their savings and this is used every adventure to record any money taken on adventure and everything brought back. This means that a character does not have to carry all her worldly wealth on an adventure so if you get mugged you won't lose it all, but you cannot during an adventure draw on funds not taken with you at the start.

Gems And Other Treasures

With respect to these, at the end of the adventure the Ref. will record their value but will not tell you that value; instead they will be entered onto your Battle Board, so that the Ref will know the exact value should you try to sell/trade them on a later adventure. You just might not get the full value from a trader unless you haggle well in which case you might get over the odds. Only the Recognise Treasure Value skill will allow you to know what things are worth.

Gems can be found as 'cut' or 'uncut'; someone with the right skill can cut uncut gems and this may improve their value, however a poor job could lower the value instead.

Weights, Distances & Measures Of Vara

Weight

Head = Kg (so called as a statue of King Smorin of Erinan's head was used as a default)

Ton = Ton

Measures

Pint = Pint

Cask = (anderarm cask) 15 pints

Barrel = (big enough to hold a man) 15 cask

Vat = (normal brewing size) 15 barrels

Distance

1 Hand = 6 inches

1 Pace = 3 foot

League = mile

Potions

The potions will be set to a standard colour (food colouring) and taste (flavouring essences). Using a base of pure water this is to enable those with the discern skills to attempt to role play the identification of a potion rather than use the skill. If this is done then it will be reflected in the points awarded by the Ref. at the end of the adventure.

(The standard receptacle for all potions seems to be the 'Coke' style plastic bottle. Each bottle holds 500ml. Thus each dose of the standard potions is about 100ml, thus a bottle holds up to 5 doses of a potion. This means that in order to use the potion the player **MUST** consume the liquid unless there is a good reason, such as allergy to the content.)

Standard Potion Appearance.

<u>POTION</u>	<u>FLAVOUR</u>	<u>COLOUR</u>
<i>Herbal Paste</i>	<i>Mint</i>	<i>Red</i>
<i>Tonic</i>	<i>Mint</i>	<i>Green</i>
<i>Sweetwater</i>	<i>Vanilla</i>	<i>Light Blue</i>
<i>Liquid Fire</i>	<i>Chilli Sauce</i>	<i>Amber</i>
<i>Life Water</i>	<i>Vanilla</i>	<i>Dark Blue & 'bits' in it</i>
<i>Quicksilver</i>	<i>Coffee</i>	<i>Dark Blue</i>
<i>Stonewater</i>	<i>Rum</i>	<i>Light Brown</i>
<i>Cup 'o Cheer</i>	<i>Mulled Spices</i>	<i>Dark Red Wine</i>
<i>Flash Powder</i>	<i>(Powder)</i>	<i>Red</i>
<i>Moon Bottle</i>	<i>Sage</i>	<i>Clear with Moss in it</i>

Games of Vara

One for the Pot

One for the Pot is played in many places. It is well liked as it has low stakes though players can change the stakes if they all agree. New players can join at any time, players can drop out easily without disrupting the game and it is fast and exciting.

All the players are in a circle; each turn you cast 1 Guilder into the pot. Starting with the lead player, each player in turn rolls two six sided dice. On a double 1 you have to add another guilder to the pot immediately (to the shout of “One for the Pot”). On a double 6 you get to roll again immediately for free. If anyone rolls a Seven, they win the pot on the spot and a new turn begins.

Once everyone has rolled, each player who wants to be active for the next turn must again add a guilder to the pot, anyone not paying must step out of the circle, and this is when anyone new can join the game. The lead moves one step round the circle and the rolling begins again.

Certain high stakes games have been known to run to a thousand guilders a turn!

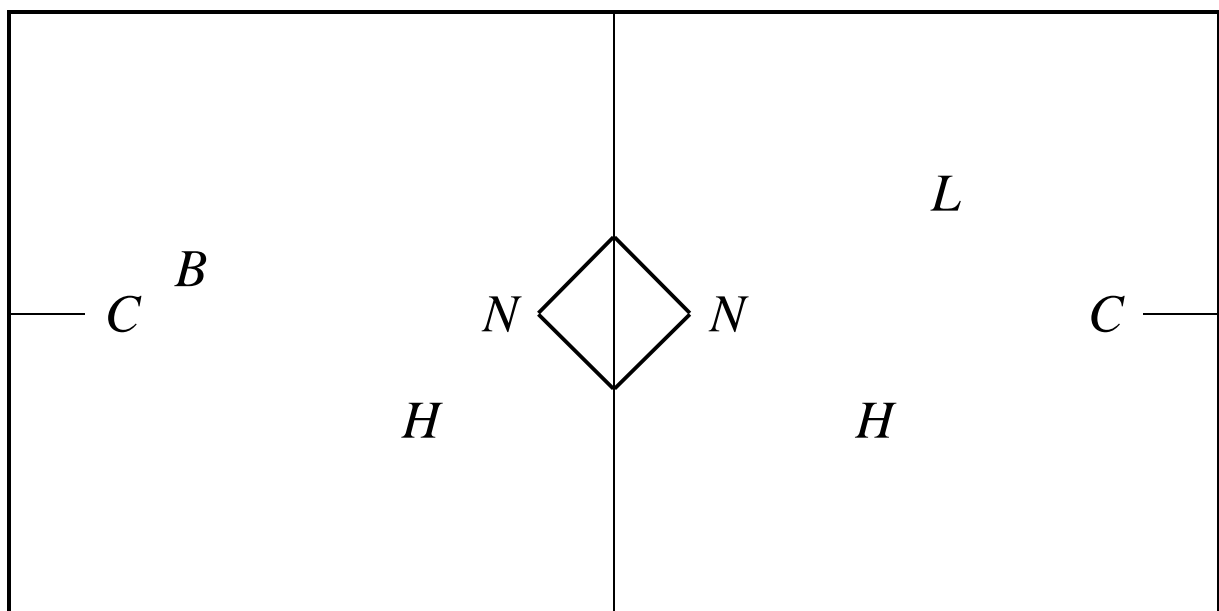
Dog Ball

Dog Ball enjoys many followers, and is an adaptable game depending on the size of field and number of players available.

The basic aim is to get the ‘skull’ from the middle of the field, and set it on the post at the scoring end of the other team’s half of the field, while preventing the other team taking possession of the skull and scoring in your half. If no players are left ‘in’ the game then the current ‘run’ ends and everyone resets to initial positions. Victory goes to the first team to be on at least three points and ahead of the other team by two points.

Teams normally consist of four active players and one reserve; though if members of a team are too injured to play, they can sit in reserve in case they can rotate back in. A reserve can be swapped in either just after a point is scored, or when a reset happens. In more brutal games extra players may be include in the total active and reserve. Normally a game scales in blocks of 2 active and one reserve at a time. Exceptionally large games might use ten active and four reserve players a side.

The middle point of a field is a circle 10ft across (so 5ft from the centre point), a run starts with the skull in the middle of the circle and the two Nimbles on the edge of the circle on their own team side. Until the skull is taken outside the circle only the nimble can enter it, anyone else entering causes the ‘run’ to reset. Once the skull has crossed the circle, anyone can enter it freely.



One of the team should start guarding the scoring post of their side of the field, the rest of the team must be somewhere on the field no further forward than the nimble and no further back than the scoring post. The scoring post is five foot from the back edge of the field, and should be halfway between the between the long sides of the field, A field should normally be twice as long on a long side as it is tall on a short side. Some use walled arenas, some post and rope barriers, and some painted lines on a packed earth field. The game is normally played with wooden weapons in most places; however the more major teams use blunted metal ones. Some underground games use real sharp weapons for added excitement or brutality. In a normal game players need only strike an opposing player on the body once to take them out of the game, but as they are taken out by only one body hit themselves, a cautious player avoids brawling unless needed.

There are several positions that can be played:

Nimble: Armed only with a long dagger, this position relies on speed, and in major games is only allowed to wear leather armour or padded cloth.

The Cover: Armed with a heater shield and a short weapon, this position allows cover for the nimble or blocking out opponents in the path of the Nimble getting to the scoring post or in defence is to bar the way of the Nimble. In major games they are allow to wear Leather or Scale armour.

The Long: Armed with a pole-arm, this position allows for the over of a larger area, but can be easy for the nimble to slip past, in major games they wear heavier amour, either chain or plate.

The Heavy: Armed with a two handed weapon, this position is used to either block or help punch through the other teams defence. In major games they can wear any armour available, normally Scale or Chain.

The Blade: Armed with two short weapons, they specialise in either blitzing the other team's line, or in threatening the Nimble and requiring the Cover to deal with. Generally in major games they wear any armour from padded up to studded leather.

In major teams, the game is played more roughly, and players can be injured, knocked unconscious or suffer broken bones, so armour is allowed, though only certain positions can use certain types; however only one body blow is needed to take a player out of the game still.

In full contact underground games, lives can be at risk and armour plays an important part, players keep hold of the ball as long as they can still hold it, so strikes to incapacitate arms or knock the opponent sprawling are more common.

The quick variant of the game is played with one Quick, and any two of the other positions on a side. The field tends to be smaller, and a 3 foot circle is used in the middle of the field.

Pure weapons are NEVER allowed (unless a very, VERY rare event of two teams of mages playing in an underground variant, but such teams command massive fees and only fight one another). Magic weapons and amour are only allowed by agreement of both teams. Normally only mundane weapons and armour are allowed, with skill being the focus. Spells are also forbidden and spectators interfering in games are frowned on severely by spectators, players and guard alike.

It goes without saying that significant bets are made on games, on 'runs' and on tournaments as a whole, some farms and villages have been known to settle disputes with neighbours through games, commonly things like grazing rights which are important but not in need of resorting to legal judgement use this method.

The Kingdoms of Vara

Dralazar

The Western Kingdom of Dralazar is mainly formed by a vast tract of desert that runs right up to the shore of the Western Sea, In the north it runs to open grassland where it borders with Calsmeer along the Great West Road and to the south it shares a mountainous border with Erinan.

This country is the ancestral home of the Suntop elves. They fill this kingdom with their caravans, travelling from one sand-locked city to the next and trading with all the other lands. By land and via the Inland sea they trade with Calsmeer and Erinan, and via their growing navy with Gralamire, Kiral and to some extent Amatukiland. On the Western coast, sea trade up to Calsmeer has vastly increased since 1512 leaving from First Light. There have also been a few tentative voyages out into deeper water, most lead by the now famous Captain Elizabeth Jennison.

One of the most notable features is the famous Mount Amistad, located near the border with Calsmeer; this extinct volcano is surrounded by lush plant life and it is here that the famed Dragon-Riders and their mounts make their home.

The area around the Great West Road is a wide plain of rolling grassland, inhabited by nomadic tribes of humans and Elves who follow a religion of animal totem mysticism. While in some ways they are akin to the Wyldmen of the northern and southern borderlands, they tend to be more civilised in nature, less likely to raid and more likely to trade with travellers and welcome them to share a campfire near the road.

The Calymnae have had a hard time finding a place within the desert kingdom. At first it seemed as though they were getting somewhere in their dealings with King Shamizel. However, on his passing, they were ignored by the nobility more interested in trying to influence the young heir. Since Prince Azharizhad and the dowager Princess Shalzeera have formed their co-regency, there has been a withdrawal of dealings with the foreigners. They are allowed to trade within the boundaries of the kingdom, but at this time, there has been no allowance of a stable enclave beyond a few houses in First Light, and certainly no allowance to uphold their own laws. Trade with them has been slow and steady, primarily in textiles, and while they are not well liked by the guilds, they are proving to have some popularity, especially with the nomads of the north of the kingdom.

Ruler

Until recently The King of Dralazar was Shamizel, a Suntop who had entered into his third century of life. He reigned in peace for well over a hundred years and in his time saw the safety of travellers and traders within the deserts increase. He finds it a little difficult to relate to the human rulers of the neighbouring kingdoms, as their lives seemed so fleeting that he could hardly get to know them. Indeed whenever he met Queen Elenora he had to try very hard not to ask her if she would like to play with his youngest daughters, or to give her a sweet (for which he has a passion) and pat her on the head.

Physically he was not as spry as he used to be, as more than two centuries of eating sweets had left him with more girth than a normal elf. He was unusual among Suntops as he had hair of a red that matches the flaming sunsets of his arid land, while his skin matched the alabaster sands of the beach outside the walled city of Firstlight.

In the Year 1515 he passed away in his sleep; rule has tentatively been placed in the hands of his grandson, Prince Azharizhad. However, until he is old enough and ready to take the responsibility fully, his dowager aunt Princess Shalzeera has been named as co-regent.

This is following several months in which the line of succession was disputed, as several of the older, hard line members of the nobility frowned at the thought of one of Shamizel's daughters taking the throne as queen in her own right. While the two of them have formed an incredibly strong alliance and unified front against any who might question the validity of their co-reign, there have been those who have tried to make trouble, all of whom have been publicly punished.

Early on, Viscount Eddish'salmak grossly overstepped the bounds of propriety, and in punishment was stripped of half of his lands and tasked with completing a new monument in honour of the late King Shamizel, thereby reducing any political sway he may have had while commenting on the age of the Crown Prince, or insulting the gender of his regent, as well as tying up his resources and time in more productive pursuits.

More recently, High Priestess Silara Ansh'ak was stripped of the nobility rank and lands that she had held for trying to insinuate herself into the Crown Prince's household and bring him under her sway. While her church has spoken out against her actions, the church of Shashay has, in the last few months found itself fallen out of favour in Dralazar.

There have been rumours coming out of the court that there may well be changes to the inheritance rights of the royal women, who at the moment stand apart from the nobility in their inability to inherit the throne. However, none of this has been seen to be happening, and if it is, then few know of it. Since the start of Decander, a slow, steady progression of young eligible women, both from the courts of Dralazar and from further afield have been making their way through royal audiences, although as yet there has been no formal announcement that the Crown Prince is seeking a bride.

Since late 1516 the political climate in the kingdom has started to settle. There have been no more challenges to the crown, and no more punished nobles who have stepped out of line. The number of young, eligible women arriving at court has however continued to rise, and in the early days of 1517, it was formally announced that Prince Azharizhad would be seeking out a wife. If any thought that to step into the role of future queen of Dralazar would be easy, they would be grossly mistaken, as along with the formal announcement, a series of balls, banquets and 'tests of suitability' were announced, all apparently designed to weed out those being used as political pawns, those with their own less than pleasant agenda or those simply looking for an easy life as the monarch of a kingdom.

There has been no official word on how long this process will take, but there are several people who will have to be convinced that the young lady chosen is suitable, and they will, of course, have to be someone who Prince Azharizhad is willing to spend the rest of his life with.

Notable People and Places

Dowager Princess Shalzeera – the late King Shamizel’s third daughter, now acting as co-regent with Prince Azharizhad. Her elder sister, the eldest of Shamizel’s children turned down the role, citing her own advanced age and wishing to spend time with her own family.

Lady Khalidah Sai-Draga – The head of the Knights of the Blazing Sun is this short, prim, highly martial female Suntop into her 300’s.

Sir Erildas Lightblaze – a Knight of the Blazing Sun, one of the people who brought relief to the belaboured main keep of his order.

First-Light – the capital city and main port of Dralazar is located on the Western coast of the kingdom, and is the main stop for any ships conducting trade up and down the coastline.

The Great Library of Al-Shear – this is the High Temple of Lanokash and is located on the coast of the Inland sea in the kingdom. It is home to the head of the church, the Halfling Lore Keeper Samuel.

Produce

Sun-spider silk produced by the crystalline spiders of the coast

Oil

Potion ingredients (Mainly from the exotic fish and desert plants)

Spices

Real Life Inspiration:

Both Arabic desert culture, and a multitude of old Sinbad style films as well as the “Dune” series.

Calsmeer

The north western kingdom of Calsmeer fades quickly from the hot southern border with Dralazar along the Great West Road to become heavily wooded: the eastern border adjoins Gralamire along the line of the Great North Road. It has no clearly defined northern borderline, rather it fades into the Wyldlands somewhere in the forest, with infrequent attacks by the barbarians that live in these lands. Most of them are non-humans but a few Wyldmen have been known to assault remote hamlets and lone cabins. During the Shadowling War the Wyldmen attacked in organised and large groups causing several of the northern settlements to be abandoned, and a notable siege in the valley of Foinaven took place.

Also in the north live the hill-land clansmen, plaid clad and bound by strong ties of blood, men taking their father's name after their own with the appellation 'Dan', for example Bard DanToran, while the women prefix it with 'Vor,' for example Tessa VorToran. Feuding and enmity keep these clans at each others throats most of the time, but it is also their time proven skills in battle that keep back the Wyldmen from falling on the weaker lowlander villages with more force than they have done so far.

Most of the inhabitants are humans although there are a fair number of Elves and Halflings both in their own communities and also in mixed towns and cities. Notable locations include the valley of Nasias on the northwestern border. This valley is the home of the largest training temple for the Paladins of Lanokash, Goddess of light. It is also here that the family of Sunbow, an ancient Suntop line, makes its home.

Indeed in 1480 Shirilaris Sunbow, the grandfather of the current youngest generation of the family, fell in a battle while holding off an invasion by Nightshades at Solstarn pass in the mountains above the valley. His body along with that of the step daughter of the current king of Calsmeer, Jaelithe, and her daughter; Kathryn lie in a chapel at the temple.

The Legions of Calsmeer wear layered banded armour, affording excellent flexibility with strong protection. This is worn over a knee length tunic and hose with strap sandals and thick woollen socks in the winter with a helm that has jointed cheek flaps for the head, and a short-sword and dagger belted to the waist and a large curved oblong shield completing the ensemble. In colder weather a cloak is worn to help fend off the chill.

On the Great North Road lies the town of Clarion. Host to the annual Tournament where people from all over the lands of Vara come to compete in contests of skill at arms, magic and debate, it attracts adventurers along with peasants and nobles. The town guard and the officials of the tournament, as well as the honourable competitors enforce a strict peace. A ritual duelling circle exists for those who wish to press their case; luckily for the loser there are always a good number of healers on hand willing to help keep the fatalities to a minimum. Another feature of note is a recruitment drive by the Guilds (even the Children of Shashay) at the marketplace. Every year they each try to best the others with the number of new members. The year 1500 saw the main rivalry between the Legion of Battle, with the impressive warrior Jason Giantsbane, and the Fellowship of Hermes, with the beautiful but relatively unskilled Frost-mane maiden Elandria of the Mountains. After a brief fracas with some adventurer in which Jason hacked off a leg or two the Legion gained a landslide lead over the other Guilds (as an aside Jason was later seen leaving Clarion in the company of Elandria).

A note on symbolism; the Calsmeerian people, unlike many others, associate the image of the wolf with strength, resourcefulness, independence and courage.

Ruler

The Rulership of Calsmeer changed hands in the middle of the fortieth Year of the reign of the much-troubled King Robert Pedrianly (crowned 1462). During his reign this black haired human did much; he married the Suntop Lady Kathryn and gained from that a stepdaughter (Lady Jaelithe Pol-Dever, Dragon rider of Black Mirage), was the father of twin children, the peace loving girl Mirhan (later high priestess of Starsha for Calsmeer) and the sombre boy Ethan (born 1476). He saw the birth of Jaelithe's daughter on the same night as his own youngest girl Diem (in 1483) and saw those children grow to the age of fifteen. Then in 1498 this quiet and kindly man had delivered to him the news of the deaths of Lady Jaelithe, her daughter Kathryn, and their mounts Black Mirage and Silver Giselle and the abduction of Diem. He dispatched the twins (then twenty-two years old) to find Diem but they only returned with her shattered body and Ethan bore four parallel claw scars across his right eye. Both of them remained silent as to their adventures but Ethan retained a deep brooding nature, and where once he and Mirhan were close now a strained air pervaded.

In 1502 Robert died in his sleep, and a quiet ceremony was held in the grounds of the castle, shortly after which Ethan was crowned King of Calsmeer, Mirhan retreating to the temple in the capital. In a startling act by Ethan in 1503 the king declined to attend the council of rulers in Kiral, the first time the circle of the council had been broken in living memory, citing poor health as the reason for his non-attendance.

After several years of what was considered ill-rule by Ethan, including the re-instatement of the Blood Games and the sealing off of the kingdom from the rest of Vara, a dramatic event took place in the summer of 1510. Robert Pedrianly returned to the kingdom, despite having been declared dead, and with a core of loyal and dedicated Legions took back the reins of power in a short lived civil war. It culminated in the denouncement of Mirhan as the high priestess of Starsha during the Convocation at Coruscum, the imprisonment of Ethan and the instatement of Morden as High Priest of Starsha in Mirhan's place.

Many of the officers from the legions loyal to Ethan were purged, but most of the fighting men remained and chose loyalty to Robert rather than dismissal from service.

There followed two years of constant war against the invading forces of the Shadowlings and the allies of the Darkling Lord. Constantly the Legions of Calsmeer were called on to defend the people and the borders, slowly pulling back and giving ground, all the while Robert faced suspicion from the other rules and even doubts as to the legitimacy of his reign. Finally in 1512, early in Augustus the great third battle of Mara was fought. At first it was thought that Robert had abandoned the alliance of the five kingdoms and without the core of the legion, Vara seemed lost; but then in a stunning move of tactical brilliance and preservation of defence of home the entire Calsmeerian army teleported to the field. Robert himself at the head of an already thundering charge surrounded by the knights of Calsmeer and backed by the mounted men of his legions smashed the lines of the forces of evil, and in this act finally earned the respect and acceptance once more to the ranks of the monarchs of Vara. Even as the lines

reeled from the charge the legions deployed into final battle line and as they had over four hundred years before and the last battle of Mara took and held the centre of Vara's combined might.

The Legions of Calsmeer

A Calsmeerian legion is made up of one thousand men, however while all of them are capable of fighting, in fact each legion is made of NINE fighting centuries and not ten.

The basic unit of a legion is a century, one hundred men. Add to this the following: one Centurion, two sergeants (Princeps) (allowing a century to function as two fifty man units if needed) two cooks, two priests, two wizards/druids and the Centurion's personal servant. This makes each century number in effect one hundred and ten men.

The total of nine centuries means there are nine hundred and ninety men; the last ten men of the legion are the General (Praetor), his Honour guard of eight, and his personal servant. This totals the one thousand men of a legion.

Each Legion has different types of Century within it;

2 Heavy Infantry: Armed with scale armour, shields, one-handed spears, one-handed swords and daggers.

2 Light Infantry: Armed with studded leather armour, shields, one-handed swords and daggers.

2 Archery: Armed with studded leather armour, one-handed swords, daggers and longbows.

1 Artillery: Armed with leather armour, one-handed swords, daggers and siege weaponry, from ballistae to siege towers.

1 Heavy Cavalry: Armed with scale armour & barding, shields, lances, one-handed swords and daggers.

1 Light Cavalry: Armed with studded leather armour, lances, one-handed swords and daggers.

All Legionaries have the skills to make fortifications. They carry anything they need with them, the only things they don't carry they collect from the area, such as wood to make siege equipment and fortifications from.

The highest ideal of a legionnaire is to become a member of the King's Century, the so called "Black Century" named for the colour of their equipment, all of who are capable of fulfilling any of the roles within a legion, from artillery to heavy cavalry.

These men form the personal honour guard of the King of Calsmeer.

The other honour a Legionnaire can aspire to is to be chosen to carry the standard of the Legion, and no legion will allow it's standard to fall unless each and every man is dead. Indeed at the battle of Mara where three Legions were lost each legion's standard was found still standing, surrounded by the bodies of the men, with the dead hand of the last man holding it and the end driven into the dirt and supported by the bodies of the fallen.

Campaign accommodation: They camp in organised camps, quickly forming a defensible position. If the camp is to last more than overnight then they will create moats, palisades and such as soon as they can, often sending ahead an advance century to prepare the camp for their arrival.

In Battle each Century will leave behind both one of its wizards and one of its priests as well as the cooks and the centurion's servant to create both a camp defence guard and also a manned field hospital. The servants serve double duty as both assistants and also runners as needed to convey orders from Praetor to Centurion. In this way the Legion is able to administer prompt medical aid as well as last rites to any member in need of such services, while the combat mage and priest concentrate on offensive abilities.

Religion and the Legion: The priests can come from a number of faiths as well as mystics, as it is understood that they are serving the legion and not converting it; as such debate may be heated and religious violence is rare and frowned upon. Of the gods there are two main religions present in the legion, Bronwen Stormbrow and Lanokash. Any other non-mystic priests will be from either Osrose or Ash'i'el. Any other religion simply is not tolerated or not compatible with life as a battle priest of the legion.

Legionnaires are normally expected to either follow all the gods, or one of these four in particular.

Wizards in the Legion: the other Art users will be mainly Wizards, with at least one druid in a legion, possibly more, and the rare sorcerer (the more versatile sorcerer suffers on the battlefield from the sheer Art cost of her spells, more focused Art users simply perform better for the legion as the legion has a range of focused skills to draw on already).

The Legion, while not openly banning female soldiers, does tend to discriminate against them in roles other than the Art users or cooks; they will be billeted in the officers' portion of the camp. There is however one legion, the 6th, which is more predominantly female; known as the Queens Legion: most female foot soldiers will end up here. The other legions look down on these 'Amazons' (as they derogatorily term them, however the female legionnaires have now taken to wearing this term as a badge of pride) and pity any men assigned to fill out the ranks. They have, however, acquitted themselves well in combat in the past and are led by a fiery Praetor known as 'The Red General'.

Terminology:

Sword = Gladius

Shield = Parma

Dagger = Pugio

Spear = Hasta

Armour = Lorica

Leather = Aluta (i.e. Lorica-Aluta)

Steel = Chalybs (i.e. Lorica-Chalybs)

Heavy = Gravis

Light = Levis

Artillery = Tormenta

Cavalry = Equitatus

Infantry = Peditatus

Archers = Saggitari

Notable Legions

The Appian 1st, oldest of the legions and core of the defence of the capital.

The 6th Legion (also known as 'The Queen's Legion'), the all female legion.

The 10th Legion, Under Lord Preator Naniku this legion formed the core of the loyalist legions during the civil war in Calsmeer.

Notable People and Places

Master Healer Morden – High Priest of Starsha in the Kingdom and former member of the Order of the Broken Sword.

Storel, Baron of Navarre –member of the Legion of Battle, raised to nobility when Robert Pedrianly took the throne of Calsmeer.

Utgard VorOni – a young Druid from the North of the kingdom, a hero of Foinaven and of Mara.

Lady Nerys Briar-Dasmius – Member of the Order of the Broken Sword and follower of Lanokash.

Ashym – renowned member of the Fellowship of Hermes and member of the Order of the Broken Sword, sadly now passed away.

Sylvana of Foinhaven,– Hero of Foinaven and formerly both Warden of the Northern Marches and member of the Order of the Broken Sword.

King's Bard Arwenna VorSael – Sponsored by Robert Pedrianly.

Lady Knight Vak VorTorias – Standard Bearer for the Order of the Wolves at the 3rd Battle of Mara.

Telerlas Sunbow – Aspirant Paladin of Lanokash.

Lord Praetor Naniku – Praetor of the 10th Legion, loyal to Robert during the civil war, one of Robert's advisors and has command over all the other Legions.

Lord Sir Tirtinius DanRevor – Head of the Order of the Wolf, endorsed Robert's return to the throne. Normally accompanied by a strange pure white wolf referred to as Naniku.

Appia – the capital city of the kingdom. Home to the main temple of Starsha, which in turn has the city's ritual circle within its grounds, and the Aurora tavern, so named for the colours that play off the circle wards. The College of Brehons is also found in Appia. The city also boasts a public forum and the grand plaza near the Cathedral of Starsha, which one must cross in order to reach the palace.

Navarre – a small barony in the central region of the kingdom, famed for its wines. Now home to Baron Storel.

Dasmius on the Lea – the closest town to the home estate of the Briar-Dasmius family. The town is seen as an example of what can be achieved, in the years since the Civil war in 1510 under the guidance of Lady Nerys Briar-Dasmius the town has gone from a grim place slowly dying from neglect and misrule to one of the most progressive and prosperous places in Calsmeer.

Foinaven – this small town in the North of the kingdom became the turning point in the war against the Wyldmen allies of the Shadowlings. After being extensively rebuilt following the war the layout of the town is the epitome of a modern town and the centrepiece of the Northern border of Calsmeer.

Port Rad – Inland Sea port.

Nasaia Valley – located in the north west of the kingdom, this is the home to the Sunbow line of Suntop Elves and the training temple for the Paladins of Lanokash.

Coruscum – the town where the Convocation of Starsha is held.

Clarion – the site of the famous yearly tournament where the Guilds come together to attract new talent and people come from all over the kingdoms to show off their skill.

Produce

Food

Tapestries and Textiles

Gemstones

Marble for carving and building

Real Life Inspiration:

Calsmeer is a unique fusion of Celtic, Roman and Greek culture. Roman Britain and the way the culture changed south to north at that time would be a good period of history to look at for more ideas and inspiration.

Gralamire

In the kingdom of Gralamire lies the greatest of climate ranges, from the temperate south-western corner the land grows quickly colder as you go north eastwards. Well over half of the land is mountainous and snow-locked. Any land that is not rocky is invariably covered in thick forest that is home to monsters and orcs. It is bordered to the west by the Great North Road and separated along half of the eastern border with Amatuikland by a vast spar of the Wyldlands. Almost all of the non-transient Frost-manes come from and make their home in, this country. Indeed the land is suited almost perfectly to their needs, and yet most surprisingly there is also a sizeable populace of Ember-eyes in the small chain of volcanoes within the mountains. Most surprising of all is the fact that relations while a little strained at times are for the most part amicable.

The southern region of the country is flat arable land, here the populace is mainly human and they specialise in nomadic horsemanship with a few permanent villages. They supply cavalry to the Frost-manes, and most communities are led by a noble family of these elves. The weapons of choice are the horse spear, axe, round shield and short sword.

In the south of this country lies the site of the Battle of Mara, once haunted by ghosts and shunned by most sensible people it lies in a wide valley, the ground stained red by the blood of the fallen. Now this area is a verdant forest, grown after the 3rd Battle of Mara under the care of a powerful Druid. Overlooking this natural splendour is an encampment on a ridge populated by Renraniay in transient numbers. Nearby is a massive monument of remembrance to all those that fell in the pitched battle of 1512, nearby is a smaller marker, carrying a simple line of text:

"A fallen enemy, dedicated father and mourned husband, may peace find you at last."

The primary religion of the land is that of Bronwen Stormbrow; the Norse-like Frost-manes suit the warrior Goddess and take her teachings to heart - even the mages of the land make formidable warriors. The typical community is based around a large feast hall with attendant family homes and a strong wall of stone or wooden palisades enclosing the whole of the area. Their few cities are high in the mountains above the snowline but these are massive fortresses that have repelled attack repeatedly.

To the north of this Kingdom lies the land of the Trolls. Although relations were frequently violent across this border a change occurred in 1503. It became clear that the raiding of this land by the Trolls would cease and a new peace was forged by the arrival of a new Troll king, which caused no little consternation at the Council of rulers held that year in Kiral

At the Second Battle of Mara a force made of both the two knightly orders and a battalion of Gralamire's troops held the left flank of High King Jenia's great army. Even when surrounded on three sides, they managed to stop the Darkling Lord's army from gaining any further ground behind the rest of the allies. When the battle was over it was found that they had been annihilated down to only five souls; one Storm Knight, two peasants and two Valkyries. The courage and self-sacrifice of that brave troop was remembered in an epic ballad composed by the Elven Master-Bard of Vara, Mellanronthalas that is still quoted by commanders in desperate situations to this day, and it rarely fails to inspire those that hear it. Upon the royal banner, in the bottom right corner, there is an image of the five in battle; the pride of all Gralamire.

In contrast to the other kingdoms, the Calymnae have been finding it hard going establishing themselves in Gralamire; their one and only colony attempt met with disaster when the mountain it was on suffered massive landslides and earthquakes caused by rampaging creatures of a large and fantastical nature. Even their trading is minimal and restricted to lowland Gralamire. At court it is noticeable that delegations are given the run-around a lot and missives take their time in being resolved.

Ruler

The Queen that rules over this land is Queen Sethaine Frostwind. She has been monarch for over 200 years. Her hair is long and she wears it in a plait that reaches almost to the floor. It is a tale told among her people that she sneaks out of the palace in times of unrest and hires herself out as a scout to the commanders of the royal troops so as to share the risks of her subjects. Many veterans tell tales of a crossbow bolt that sped out of a tree or some other hiding place to smite a foe with magical force just before they were able to strike a mortal blow upon the teller of the tale. If asked about this the Queen just smiles and replies that while competent with a bow she is too busy with affairs of state to hone her skills to such levels.

Since the 3rd Battle of Mara, Queen Sethaine has been somewhat more withdrawn than usual.

Notable People and Places

Baron William Grey – this member of the Order of the Broken Sword holds an island close to the inland sea coast of Gralamire. Silverfrost – a fearsome Frost-mane warrior, she was involved in the breaking of the siege of Foinaven and played an important role in the 3rd Battle of Mara.

Thornton and Sherbert Dip – inhabitants of Coombe, the owner of “Thornton’s Handmade Confectionery” and one of his business associates.

Lady Knight Yevonda – a high ranking member of the Valkyries.

Baroness Ragnhild Pure-snow – the Frost-mane head of the female knightly order of the kingdom, the Valkyries.

Marquis Ectheow Storm-Fjord – the Frost-mane head of the male knightly order, the Storm Knights.

Prince Sethvir – Heir to the kingdom, his connection to Sethain has not fully been explained.

Iceholme – the main Frost-mane city and Capital of the kingdom.

The Escarpment – located near the Pass of Hawks and site of a great battle in the years leading up to the 3rd Battle of Mara.

Coombe – a small town in the southern part of the kingdom which is slowly gaining a strong reputation for being home to the excellent “Thornton’s Handmade Confectionery.”

Mara – the site of two battles against the Shadowling forces, this plain in Gralamire was nothing but a wasteland after the 2nd battle. Now, after the third, great monuments are being erected to the fallen, a garden is being cultivated, and the fortifications that the Renraniay established are becoming a permanent encampment, with its gates open to any.

Calymnae Mountain Colony – Not only the colony but the mountain itself suffered a terrible disaster in late 1515 which saw the deaths of many Calymnae and Varans. In the following year reports of Fae were made. Many are now advised to let the place be.

Kirtston(?) Banisher Temple – Until recently an abandoned Shield Bearer temple that had been desecrated by a group of reavers. Rededicated in Starsha’s name by the heroic self-sacrifice of one of her Banishers. Now instead of Shield Bearers, Banishers call it home.

Produce

Furs

Weapons and Armour

Raw Gemstones

Real Life Inspiration:

We drew heavily on the ideas and trapping of Norse mythology, culture and Sagas for the Frost-manes and Gralamire. They are not your typical, flighty elves, but proud strong warriors (and in their history, raiders) who have a complex culture with a strong lust for life.

Amatukiland

Amatukiland could not be more different from its northern neighbour of Gralamire. This land, lying on the equator, is a massive rainforest. Inhabited almost totally by tribal Tree-walkers, these feral elves live in simple villages and have a content, day-to-day mundane existence; they tend to have shamanic priests and druids with few wizards. However, deep within the jungle there lie the ancient Inca-like cities where the rulers live and in a secluded valley in the heart of the forest lies 'Glory in the Mist' the capital of sorts. It is from here that King Olose rules his people.

In the last century Amatukiland, under the rule of Olose's father Mamutan, staged an invasion across the River of Dreams into Erinan. The attack came deep into the country almost to the capital city and began an assault of the walls before the death of Mamutan. Olose led his people home to mourn and to complete the ritual ceremony (in which he had to eat his father's heart and eyes) that allowed him to succeed the throne. There is still an enmity between the people on either side of the River of Dreams, but the war also gave them a healthy respect for the warriors they would face in open combat should the tension ever boil over.

Since the 3rd Battle of Mara, threats between the two kingdoms have eased somewhat, although the undercurrent of tension, as ever, remains, especially amongst those who remember back to Mamutan's rule.

The rainforest does have a strong trade base; the multitude of plants and animals produce many medicinal compounds and cooking herbs and spices, and the young warriors of the tribes are known to go off adventuring in the distant cold lands before returning home to claim wives and lands. Amatukiland is like its people: wild, free, beautiful and savage.

The Calymnae have developed an odd relationship with Amatukiland. While king Olose has welcomed them, albeit with some reticence, they have had very little interest in setting up any kind of enclave beyond the one in Kiralnu. It is generally supposed that this is because they are unused to the rainforest, but they have always been careful and polite so as to not appear to be insulting the glory of the rainforest. They trade well in Kiralnu, but have found that many of their wares are ill suited to the damp conditions of the rainforest. They have however been welcomed by the carpenters and wood merchants of the city, who have made a small fortune from them; both in the purchase of materials and the sale of what they make.

Ruler

King Olose is perhaps the strangest of rulers; in the councils he has attended he comes bedecked in animal furs and feathers, yet he argues some of the most insightful and well considered treaties and debates that the other monarchs have ever heard. The reason for this is that during the invasion of Erinan he became fascinated with the content of a library that was inside the city of Darminster. He persuaded one of the captured scribes to teach him to read and took home with him wrapped up in his spoils most of the content of that building, the remaining books he burned at the request of the scribe to cover his theft. He had a secret room in his palace converted into a private study and has spent many years learning the knowledge of Vara. He realises that he must play the savage to his people to retain control of his land, but he is also slowly changing the thinking of his people in order to lead them into a future brighter than the one they have now. Around 1500, his eyesight began to fail a little, and during the council meeting that year he asked King Shamizel of Dralazar to procure him some eyeglasses from the glassmakers of the desert lands. The next year he arrived at the closed sessions, bedecked in furs and traditional war paint with a pair of glasses perched on his nose. The look on the faces of all the other monarchs (barring, of course, King Shamizel), was well worth it; he had, after all learned irony from the best scholars of Erinan.

In the years since the 3rd Battle of Mara the kingdom has slowly been trying to bring the kingdom up to more modern ways of thinking. He has been met with resistance, especially from those who were more staunch supporters of his father, but progress, slow though it is, has happened.

Notable People and Places

The Monolith – an eerie piece of basalt rock standing several miles over the top of the rainforest, and home to the kingdom's Skywise population. Deemed impossible to climb, the only way to the settlement is to fly.

Glory in the Mist – high in the mists of the mountains lies the golden capital city of this kingdom.

Malekula – another of the golden cities of this kingdom: hidden deep in the rainforests it is rarely known of by outsiders.

Kiralnu – the port city, literally 'New Kiral' as it was established by the inhabitants of the island, rather than those of the rainforests.

Tenochalan – a city built on floating pontoons in the middle of a round bowl surmounting a mountain. The floating city of Tenochalan is a wonder to behold and home to the temple of the Sun and the Moon, twin temples on the top of a wide step pyramid that overlook a large plaza which hosts a ritual circle. The circle has a set of interlocking designs inlaid into the floor in two metals, one that glows in the day and the other than glows in the night.

Produce

Furs

Potion ingredients

Feathers

Exotic plants

Raw gold

Quality papermaking wood

Real Life Inspiration:

Here you have both the current native tribes of the Amazon, with hidden, but large, cities that are basically conglomeration of Mayan, Incan and Aztec societies in look and function.

Erinan

Erinan is a beautiful pastoral land of rolling hills and grasslands interspersed with deep woodlands; the climate is warm with colder winters that snow every year but rarely blizzard. It is bordered to the west by the Mountains of the West, which contain the high peak of Mt. Demovant, and to the East by the River of Dreams that flows down from the Inland Sea. At the foot of the river, where it meets the Great Eastern Sea, lies the city port of Celtar, The centre of trade by sea and with the Duchy of Kiral. This city is also contains the headquarters of the famed Red Falcons, the personal guard of the queen of Erinan, Elenora.

The architecture of Erinese towns tends to follow a pattern of outlying homes with a large gap between them and the town walls proper. Inside the walls lie the guild-halls and the noble's homes with the centre holding the keep housing the barracks and the magistrate or lord's living quarters. In times of trouble the populace is called inside the walls and accommodated in the guildhalls and churches while all guild and church members are pressed into military service in defence of the town, whether they come from there or not. This is due to an agreement forged during the invasion by Amatukiland over a century ago which has been found to work well with only one town falling to attack before help arrived since it was put into effect.

The Beast Invasion

In the early days of summer in the year 1504 Erinan was subject to a massive invasion of a race of beings known as 'Beastmen'; in just a few days they appeared in many major and minor towns and cities in Erinan (as well as in other parts of Vara) and huge swathes of the country were occupied.

The Compact of Erinan was enforced and the country hunkered down for war, with the capital of Pironeas being besieged and relying on the ritual circle there for resupply and communication.

During this time the Queen became the victim of a strange wasting illness, leaving her to rely on the leadership of King Sourbelly of the Trolls and High Priest Stormclaw, who had been visiting the city, to protect her capital from serious harm.

The back of the invasion was broken by two different factors. Firstly a small group of adventurous souls managed to locate the main staging post of the Beastmen, and by destroying the 'Beast-Gate' through which the army travelled they were able to effectively cut off the army from any reinforcements from their point of origin. Secondly when the remaining Beastmen made an all out attack on Pironeas, a spirited defence was aided by the sudden arrival of the Troll Kings heavy cavalry that pinned the majority of the Beastman army against the walls of the capital and routed them from the field.

With the Erinan army having suffered great losses and needing to rebuild, the surviving Beastmen fell back to the area near to the Beast-gate and fortified their position. Queen Elenora decided to set up a guarded zone round this rather than spend more lives trying to dig them out, but in effect this also meant the sacrifice of many people captured and held behind the borders of this now armed and occupied enemy land in the heart of her kingdom.

Ruler

Queen Elenora (born 1481) is now thirty six years of age. She ascended to the throne aged seventeen after her father was assassinated on a hunting trip in 1498. This regal woman has led her people wisely, but her reign has not been without incident. In 1500 she only narrowly avoided being killed herself by a traitor within the ranks of her personal guard, The Red Falcons; only the prompt action of D'atalno De Celtar saved her life. He took the blow aimed for her heart with his own arm and held onto the assassin giving her guards time to hustle her away; the traitor escaped and chase was given by D'atalno. It now seems that she never appears anywhere without him by her side, being now the second in command of the entire order and chief of her personal honour guard.

She finds it very difficult to deal with the other rulers on a personal level, she was fond of King Shamizel and his manners of the old courts and always had the urge to cuddle him whenever they meet - behaviour not appropriate to her station, she misses his wise council and worries as to how to relate to the new King and Regent. Pedrianly always looks like he could do with about a week of sleep and a good meal, Sethain of Gralamire is as reserved as Elenora is herself and so they are locked in formality even in the private meetings. She finds the King of Amatukiland difficult to be around as she still suspects that her father's killer might have come from over the River of Dreams. She has however found a staunch supporter in Queen Brightstar, even if they do argue over the finer points of their chosen weapons and which is better. It is common to see the slightly built queen of Erinan walking with the towering Troll Queen during the meeting in Kiral or during visits to one another's courts.

Elenora is always very distant to people as she has lived in fear of dying the same way that her father did, and so she rarely lets anyone get physically close to her, let alone emotionally. Only the men and women of her Red Falcons form anything like friends for her. She is open to new ideas however - the formation of the South Essen, a Regiment using ranged magical items under the command of Richard Edgeman has been a very successful experiment in the hopes of ensuring the defence of Erinan. In June 1512 Elenora was wed to the Red Falcon Datalno De'Celtar in a move that outraged many of her councillors and was a cause for most of the common folk to celebrate despite the harshness of the war against the Shadowlings. By the end of the Shadowling War the Queen had fought personally against the forces of the Shadowlings allies, becoming a fully fledged member of her own knightly order. By 1515 she was the mother of twins, a boy and girl, and more beloved by her people than any ruler of Erinan in history.

The twins, Charles Etienne and Cosette Éclair are very alike; both have the dark hair of their father and the delicate features of their mother. Charles is the elder by a short amount, however it is seen that Cosette tends to be the more dominant of the two. The pair are guarded round the clock by the Red Falcons and great care is taken to ensure their safety and protection. So far they have not been formally presented to court though they have visited a couple of times and many nobles know them by sight. The Falcons make sue that not only is there always a watchful guard, but during the day there is also a close in guard who spends time playing and helping care for the children. It would seem the twins will grow up with a crop of utterly loyal and doting extended family of 'Aunts' and 'Uncles'. Cosette is also rarely seen without a curious little white lizard on her person, normally it sits on her shoulder or rests on her forearm when she is sitting down.

Notable People and Places

Heleen Tanner – warrior, tavern owner and member of the Order of the Broken Sword, she is an inhabitant of the small town of Drenth.

Lord Kierran Summoner – husband of Lady Josephine Summoner and member of the Order of the Broken Sword. A trusted member of the Queen's court and respected member of the Fellowship of Hermes.

Kiall – a mercenary of the Silver Swords who was said to have taken a blow from the Shadowling Lord that would have felled a lesser man. Now believed to have passed away.

Greeka – this Goblin is a hedge witch and apothecary to the Queen.

D'atalno De Celtar – married to Queen Elenora, making him Prince Consort and a member of the Red Falcons.

Altos, Aramand and Palthos – prominent members of the Red Falcons. Close friends to D'atalno De Celtar.

Major Richard Edgeman – commander of the South Essen.

The Chamberlain, Francois – enjoys a large amount of power and influence in the Kingdom, and is suspected to not be above abusing that power.

Sheen – Queen Elenora's Troll Red Falcon bodyguard.

Lady Joanna D'Alessa – a noblewoman of Erinan whose lands are known as the Land of the Unicorn. Young in appearance, despite having held the title for a while.

Alucard Li'Ember – personal guard to the Chamberlain of Erinan. A very silent and stoic bodyguard walks with odd gait or limp.

Known for cutting down anyone who makes an attack against the chamberlain, with an almost uncanny amount of strength.

Baron Allon of Tyras – A young man responsible for the rebuilding of a city once lost. The crown has made his full rank of Lord reliant on his accomplishing this mammoth task.

Pironeas – the capital of Erinan.

Celtar – this is the kingdom's eastern seaport city where the River of Dreams lets out into the ocean and is home to the Red Falcons, the knights of Erinan.

Port de Belleme – the Inland Sea port, located at the mouth of the River of Dreams.

Chendra – the home town of Lady Joanna D'Alessa. It is close to the foot of Mount Demovant, and the skies above it were the location of a battle between two enormous dragons in the early days of the year 1512.

Mount Demovant – few people will venture close to this mountain. Stories say that it is haunted, and it is certainly home to some old and important burial chambers, as well as there also often being odd lights visible around the summit. The general opinion is that it is mystical, probably dangerous, and best left alone.

Danesford keep – The fort of the Order of the Broken Sword; this well hidden keep is maintained by a garrison of Treewalkers led by Lially Stillmere.

Drenth – this town was home to the Tanners Arms and its owner, Heleen Tanner, as well as being a town in a state of prolonged growth and prosperity. However it was raised to the ground by an attack suspected to be perpetrated by a dragon of some kind in the year 1514, there are rumors of a few people living there again now but the place is given a wide berth by most as an ill favoured place.

Produce

Weapons and Armour

Healing Potion ingredients

Weaving and Textiles

Furniture

Livestock animals

Food

Real Life Influences:

Erinan is your basic French/English fantasy setting, with a little of the Musketeer type swashbuckling thrown in for good measure. It is based on Feudal City-state societies.

The Duchy of Kiral

The Duchy is located on a large island sitting smack in the middle of the Inland Sea, which is in turn at the heart of Vara. Each of the five kingdoms borders the sea and so have ports there. The Duchy of Kiral was once the seat of the High King and his line, but with the death of that line in 1100 it became a reclusive community. Where once it used to govern the other Lands it now served as a base for its trade fleets that ply the waters of the Inland Sea and maintained the good relations between the disparate rulers. It is here that, once a year, the monarchs come to meet in council and forge treaties. To some extent these trips also form a holiday of sorts as the Duchy is strictly neutral and maintains the peace between the rulers and their entourages. One can find many pleasures to relax you here, from riding in the huge gardens to dancing at one of the many ambassadorial balls to simple fishing in the calm streams. However, while any stranger is made to feel welcome at all times, few are permitted to stay long on this island nation. It does not permit immigrants from the other nations to its shores. As a point of interest it is said that on some evenings you can see a metallic dragon circling the towers of the palace.

In March of 1512, with little ceremony or explanation, Kiral began to fly the flag of the High King at $\frac{3}{4}$ mast, since this was only used to signify an uncrowned heir to the throne of the High King speculation erupted across Vara, in this sore time of war the promise of a High King gave the lands something to rally round, to hope for.

In Late June a name was announced, Carnak Muzak had claimed and been tentatively verified as rightful heir to Jenia's throne. However his first act was to board a vessel bound beyond Vara to try to end the war. Troubled the armies began to gather at Mara. But the hopes of Vara were not in vain, on the very eve of Battle Carnak and many other heroes of Vara stood at the gates of the command encampment at Mara, and on the morning of the 10th Augustus he took the field of battle with the men and women of all kingdoms. He fought side by side and finally stood alone against the Darkling Lord, a very mortal man against a being empowered by a force of unimaginable evil and power. Despite deep wounds he overcame the Darkling Lord and once and for all broke the power of the army of Evil.

Finally in 1513, as summer crested into autumn, the island of Kiral once more crowned its king, and the High King of Vara, since then the green cloaks of the Kiral guard have watch the great roads and enclaves, these superbly trained and equipped warriors are the arm and voice of the High King carrying his law and justice where they go.

Ruler

Kiral is now ruled by the High King Carnak. A ruler forged in battle and the one who slew once and for all the Shadowling Lord, freeing all of Vara from his tyranny for all time. The young Ember-Eye is still adjusting to statecraft and relies on his advisors for guidance.

A council of five used to guide the Duchy, other than that little was known about the rulers. They sent a representative to the council of monarchs to speak for the Duchy but it was never the same person twice, and they elected to sit on a simple footstool next to the chair of the High King rather than taking that seat for themselves.

Notable People and Places

Mirel Fass-Hamver- a Suntop member of the knights of Vara.

Deali Fass-Hamver – another knight of Vara, husband to Mirel.

Tarain – head of the Guild of Bards and Herald, the first time that the same person has held the seat for more than one year.

Mark – scribe of the council, head of the scholars.

Craven – head of the Kiral Guard, personally responsible for the security of the keep of Kiral.

Carnak Muzak - High King of Vara and member of the Order of the Broken Sword.

The Grand Marshals – the commanders of each of the great roads, they tend to be based in the main enclaves at the terminus ends of the roads, either on the inland sea or the far extremes of the road's reach.

North

East

South

West

Kiral City – the main, and only, city on the island, with the open port landing leading up to its gates. The navy of Kiral operates out of several specially protected and sealed ports on the island, the massive sea-gates built into the cliffs allow none bar the ships berthed there access.

Kiral Village – the centre of farming on the island, much of the rest of the island is home to both forest and evenly spaced farms to support the populace as well as a few mines working the rim-wall edges of the island.

The four Great Roads on the mainland of Vara are also considered to be Kiralian land, and therefore neutral territory for the other kingdoms. At each end of the Roads (apart from the lost terminus of the Great East Road) stand the Enclaves, trade and negotiation points and the command points for the Kiral Guard.

As of 1517 infrastructure is being established to try to reclaim the Great East Road, many wonder what remains of the enclave that once stood at its terminus and rumours abound of several missions being planned to try to discover its fate.

Real Life Inspiration:

Without a doubt, the concept for Kiral is inspired by the island of Riva in the David Eddings "Belgariad" series.

The Trolls of Vara

By Marius Shanan, scholar and historian

The trolls of Vara are a proud race, known as strong and fierce warriors. Many underestimate their intelligence thinking them merely hulking brutes; rather it is just that this ancient race simply solve problems in the most immediate and practical method possible. Why attempt to puzzle out the lock on a door that can simply be smashed aside? The trolls have a well-developed culture that has only recently come to light, here is what I have managed to piece together.

Appearance

Trolls are huge, standing half again as tall as a human. They are powerfully built and tend to dress in hardy clothes especially when working. While their features tend to be rougher than a human's, they all adhere to a tradition of wearing face-paint to denote their role. The paint is worn as a wide band of colour across the eyes, reaching from the level of the eyebrows down onto the upper cheek. Over this they lay a layer of black that renders the colour into a sharp craggy burst of colour round the eyes and 'fanging' down their cheeks.

As everyone in Troll society has a job and a purpose, the changing of the colours would mark a huge turning point in the person's life.

Red and orange are reserved for warriors.

The few Spellcasters seen seem to wear white, though this can also be a colour for an elder.

Priests of Bronwen wear deep blue (others would wear the white of a Spellcaster).

Scouts and rangers wear green.

Tradesmen wear sandy brown; this also tends to be the standard colour for the general populace.

Druids wear a dark, terracotta brown.

Those involved in entertainment of the people (jugglers, musicians, artists, actors, those of negotiable favours) wear vibrant pink.

Outcasts wear a black band with the craggy effect on the cheeks; they have no place in the society, but remain trolls to the end.

Children generally wear the black crag effect without a coloured band under it as they have yet to choose their role in life.

This system is NOT to be confused with the one used by traitor trolls who serve the Shadowlings; they wear solid bands of colour across the eyes in a semblance of the Shadowlings own rank structure glowing eyes.

The history of the Trolls

The trolls, like the elves, descend from before recorded history in the mystic age; it is known that they were first creations of evil, but it is clear that at some point they turned from this and became neutral in the conflict. It is probable they lived in more lowland areas at this time and developed as the first farmers and toolmakers outside of the elves, as they are not an innately magical race as the elves are. It is due to this that it was the trolls that first discovered the burgeoning race of man and helped guide them into civilization; indeed for the reason there is no separate troll 'language' as it were is because ancient trollish was the beginning of what was to become the common language used by all the races of Vara today.

The trolls gradually receded north as humans expanded and settled more lands, they made their home amongst the northern mountains, further north even than the Frost-mane elves, since this area had been left alone by the elves. As the kingdoms of Vara grew and the first High King was crowned the trolls had retreated and become insular, and so became isolated from the rest of Vara. This was how it remained for the next 1100 years until the time of the battle of Mara.

The battle of Mara is well known for the loss of the last High King, Jenia, but he was not the only king lost to a people that day.

For the trolls were a part of the invading army from the north led by their reckless, and oft thought insane, monarch. He was slain during the battle by a courageous human warrior; unfortunately no record of this remains and the identity of the warrior remains unknown.

On his death the trolls withdrew from the fighting, and headed back to their homeland. Once back in the north the trolls reverted again to an insular age; only now that new information has been discovered can I relate the events that followed.

The old king had indeed been thought insane by many of the older trollish families, who had no wish to see such a situation happen again and so formed a council to govern the lands in the absence of a king. This system worked for the trolls, but things changed sometime in the early 1400's (the exact date is unfortunately not known) however they changed slowly. It was in fact due to re-emergence of the Shadowlings, the race that made up the bulk of the darkling lords army, from the time of the battle of Mara who were subtly corrupting the rule of the council. Approximately 80 years later they moved in a more dramatic fashion, when they apparently killed the troll families that preferred the isolation, including many of those that made the council, and subjugated the remaining trolls as a faction that supported the Shadowlings moved into power. This effectively gave the Shadowlings their old allies once more, but now as a conquered people.

This has now recently changed, and I have spoken to key figures involved directly in the events that unfolded including a great deal related to me by a Trollish hero, Stormclaw.

Apparently the Shadowlings were not as effective as they had thought about killing all the members of the noble families that had ruled as the council. A young Troll by the name of Sourbelly had escaped; unfortunately my storyteller would not go into details about the escape or early life of Sourbelly or the reasons for their return to the troll lands, but it became clear that the only way for a resistance faction to overthrow their Shadowling masters was for a symbol to emerge that they could follow: a leader. Thus with the return of a long lost noble son, hope that he may become a new king to lead his people against the Shadowlings prompted them to take action at last, and indeed the Shadowlings were driven from the land and Sourbelly proclaimed King (1503). I myself have witnessed his valour in leading the armies of Erinan against the Beastmen invaders at the siege of Pironeas.

The recent history of the Trolls

After the freeing of the Trolls from the yoke of the Shadowlings many great steps were made in bringing them into the fold of the rest of the Varan Kingdoms, perhaps the most enduring legacy of King Sourbelly's rule is the formal acceptance of the Troll Lands as the sixth Kingdom of Vara held under the High Kingship. With the guidance of Stormclaw and the hand of Bronwen helping them the Trolls not only built a fighting force to protect themselves, but also an army that helped tip the odds at Mara in 1512 to allow Vara as a whole to survive. Without the timely intervention of the Troll heavy cavalry things might have gone very differently indeed.

However this did not come without a cost, just as in 1100 the Trolls arrived with a king, but left without one. Sourbelly was felled on the field fighting in a titanic battle against a monstrous Shadow dragon, wounded beyond the capacity of most being to even stand Sourbelly epitomised the tenacity and endurance of his people in refusing to fall and gave every last ounce of strength he had trying to defeat the monster. Since his passing he has been hailed as a Bronwenian ideal of heroism and stoicism.

Rule then passed to his Sister Queen Brightstar, and the Army of the trolls has reduced in numbers. Many of the proud trolls now live the life of craftsmen and labourers, but have in a place of pride in their homes the gleaming Star-steel armour and weapons they carried to the field of Mara. Every year on the remembrance of Mara they don their armour and stand in memory of the king they lost at shrines and temples of Bronwen. It is a new tradition that when one of the army passes, the responsibility for attending falls to the eldest child, or if there are none to inherit it, the armour is passed to the care of the Bronwenian shrine or temple to wait for when it is needed in the defence of the people and given to the one best suited to use it. Then on that person is to stand witness for the past wearer at the remembrance in the armour.

Anyone found in possession of such armour without a right to wear it, or treating it without the respect is it due risks serious retaliation from any self respecting troll, and all possible action would be taken to recover the armour and return it to the troll lands and the family of the one who wore it at Mara, or to the church of Bronwen. The lineage of the wearer of the armour should be something quotable from memory by one possessing it unless they have a very good explanation.

Troll religion and culture

The trolls are a determined and strong people and as such mainly worship Bronwen Stormbrow, although there are communities of druids in the many forests of the troll lands. Many priests of the trolls however do not extensively use magic granted by the gods, as they are not an innately magical race.

The Temple of Bronwen Stormbrow in the Troll Lands

Most Trolls worship the Goddess Bronwen Stormbrow. Most if not all Troll priests are priests of Bronwen. There is no real set structure of the Church of Bronwen Stormbrow in the Troll Lands, although there is a High Priest. The main temple is at Tatastagol, which is quite near the capital city Mountain Home. Tatastagol does receive many keen Trolls who want to publicly show their devoutness to their goddess now that they can worship openly. This means that the two priests who currently reside at the massive Fortress Temple are hard pushed to keep the place going. Large areas of the temple are in a poor state of repair and generally the once proud Fortress is looking quite shabby. Indeed the small handful of Priests in the Troll-Lands are all suffering from over-work at the moment.

Tatastagol – Fortress of the Goddess Bronwen Stormbrow in the Troll Lands

Location

The fortress can be found about two hours journey north of the capital Mountain Home, situated on a high altitude plain. The fortress itself is built on top of one of the rocky outcrops in the plain. There are other outcrops of this type scattered around the plain.

General Description

From the outside the fortress seems to be a circular wall, rising out of the stone itself. This is accurate as if viewed from above the plan of the fortress is a near perfect circle. It has a steep causeway approaching the fortress, crossing the front so that any attackers will present their side to the fortress. Entrance is over a metal drawbridge that has been part of the gate since the building was completed. The fortress has obviously been built by a mixture of work forces, as Trolls alone could not build a temple-fortress of this nature, while they obviously have made the oversized halls, walls and passageways. To humans, elves, dwarves and other races the place seems very spacious. However to a Troll the place seems to "fit just rite!" Elves, humans and dwarves must have been involved in the carving, tapestries and glass work.

The Gatehouse

The gatehouse is simple and straightforward. It has all the usual defence mechanisms, arrow slits and the like including murder-holes above, as well as the thick main door (which is again metal and has a somewhat complex and heavy locking mechanism) it has two inner portcullises beyond this to also impede any attacker.

Outer Keep

Once inside you reach the main ground. Inside the grounds is a six pointed star shaped inner keep. The main entrance to this keep is on the opposite side to the main entrance to the fortress, with walls of the fortress being quite thick. On the left as you enter there are a series of rooms for the rank and file of the temple and on the right there are stables, workshops and the like. In the grounds there are a variety of areas; gardens for contemplation, for combat, for training etc. Also in the grounds are several wells, a staple for any serious fortress.

Inner Keep

The Inner Keep as previously mentioned is a six pointed star shaped building. The entrance to the fortress is directly opposite to the main entrance, leading you on a walk around the keep from the entrance to get into the inner keep. The entrance to the inner keep is quite splendid, with huge iron wrought doors, which are set in a door frame with magnificent carvings around the edges. The carvings depict many famous warriors and priests of the church in battle against numerous foes.

The entrance leads in to a medium sized antechamber which has three exits; one leading left and another right which lead around the rest of the inner keep, and another one in line with the entrance to the keep which leads into the main hall. This antechamber is an oversized cloak room and meeting room. There are a few nooks in the wall by each entrance so guards can do their job without being in the way.

The Main Hall

The Main Hall of the fortress is quite beautiful in its elegance and simplicity. It is a great circular hall in the middle of the Inner Keep and the centre of the room there is a great statue of Bronwen. Around her are great slabs of gemstone and glass set in to the floor, which provide light into the ritual circle area below it. These light-wells for the ritual circle are set in to the floor slightly so they can be covered if needs be. The hall is also lit in a similar way from above. Indeed the whole keep is lit through the use of light-wells. The ones in the main hall are quite spectacular covering the whole place in a multitude of shafts of light. The light-wells here are made of coloured glass and again gem stones. Around the outside of the hall there are many alcoves in which there are statues of priests, heroes and warriors of Bronwen, from all the races of Vara.

The star points of the keep are numbered from left to right, starting with the first point which is to the left of the entrance.

Point 1 – This point contains various workshops and the like.

Point 2 – High Priest's Quarters, other senior priests' quarters, library, studies and entrance to the ritual circle.

Point 3 - This point faces the entrance to the fortress. As a result it has more arrow slits than other points. This point has the main armoury for the fortress and quarters for visitors, lower priests and soldiers.

Point 4 – This fortress has the kitchens and stores that serve the inner keep and main hall.

Point 5 – This point contains the most opulent quarters the fortress has and is used for visiting dignitaries and the like.

Point 6 – This point contains other libraries and study rooms. It also contains some strong rooms that are occasionally used as cooling off rooms for those who have gotten a bit rowdy.

Ritual circle

The ritual circle was once on the top of this outcrop, however now the circle is buried in the bowels of the fortress. The circle itself can only be entered via a flight of steps which lead downwards to a large stone door. This door is large and thick enough that it cannot be moved by a single person. The room which encloses the circle can be closed off completely; metal shutters can cover the light-wells and the air vents and even the door. The floor of the room is not smooth, as it is the surface of the outcrop on which the fortress stands.

Current State of the Fortress

The fortress is currently in a good state indeed. When the Shadowlings came the gates of the fortress were closed and the priests departed.

However the strong magic of the place and the final ritual the High Priest of the Fortress conducted meant that the Shadowlings were denied entry to the temple. Tatastagol is humming with quiet energy.

A temple is never going to be a raucous place, it has a feeling of life and strength that hasn't been felt in the walls for a long time. The priests that look after the fortress are:

Stormwind – Stormclaw's mother and one of the Bronwenian Priestesses from before the Shadowling purge during their occupation of the Troll-Lands.

Gutrot – Once a young novice, Gutrot is now in charge of all the novice priests.

Dubach – Now getting on for a troll, Dubach is the head cook at the fortress.

The fortress is nearly at full capacity; most rooms are full. It is now a fully functioning and strongly garrisoned fortress once more. It is in a good state of repair and the novices keep the place spick and span.

The gardens are flourishing and the tapestries re-hung with new ones being added showing the recent history of the Troll Lands and Vara, especially the fall of the great King Sourbelly.

History

The fortress has stood in this place for well over a thousand years and its history has been colourful over the years. The previous High Priest was a Frost-mane elf named Atalaiel; he left when the Shadowlings came and has not been heard of since. As has been mentioned it has been neglected until recently.

The other main temple in the Troll Lands is in the north at Noyabrask. At the moment there are a reasonable number priests in the Troll Lands; this is due to the aftermath of the Shadowling occupation. There are five priests of note currently in the Troll Lands, they are:

Stormclaw - the High Priest.

Stormwind – a priestess and leader of the church when Stormclaw is absent..

Stormbreeze – a priestess advanced in years.

Gutrot - a young Troll priest novice.

Dubach - a middle-aged Troll Priest.

Gutrot and Dubach both currently reside in the main temple at Tatastagol.

Stormwind has just moved there. Stormbreeze is in the west of the Troll Lands in semi-retirement at the moment, although she would like to found a temple in the west of her home land. The other priests are still fairly 'new' priests as while a reasonable amount of time has gone by since the Shadowlings left it's not been that long.

Stormclaw has left some instructions to the priests left in the Troll Lands:

1 - Keep the Faith.

2 - Recruit more priests - very urgent.

3 - If you can find ritual circles do so.

Trollish architecture and craft is defined by the people they are - it is simple and practical, but exceptionally well crafted; Trollish structures will stand the test of time.

Trolls seem to have a great constitution and so can eat nearly anything which is all for the best as farmland is at a premium in their lands. But timber and stone for building is easy to find as are large deposits of Iron ore and coal, along with the limestone found in the lowland hills of the troll lands; it is no surprise that they can produce high quality steel goods, including armour and weapons.

The Troll lands and major settlements within

The Troll lands, are often referred to just as such but the Frostmanes of the north refer to the lands as Silathkeshavaarn (the closest translation this would give me is mountains before evil, but it could very well be an error in translation), and the trolls being practical people did not give their land a different name so as there would be no confusion. The Trolls are a private people and as such do not usually form large communities. They have only one city of moderate size in the kingdom, Mountain Home, which contains the council building and the royal estates. Strangely though it does not contain their main temple to the Goddess Bronwen Stormbrow, which lies a little way north of the city.

Ruler

Queen Brightstar – sister of the hero Sourbelly and monarch after his death at the 3rd Battle of Mara in 1512, She is untested as a ruler but some see the fact she wields the artefact of Bronwen as a mark of divine providence to her rule. She has been generous in offering the skill and strength of her people to other lands to help rebuild after the war. Through this she has opened up many trade relations and the Trolls now enjoy a sense of prosperity that they have not known before.

The Troll Army

By William Von Branburg

The following is an authoritative account of the composition of the troll army as told to me by the newly crowned Troll King Sourbelly. I have verified this information from various other sources.

The standard regiment of the Troll Army is a 'Spear'. The army has been re-organised after the Shadowling war, however Spears are still the traditional unit of the Troll army. The previous Troll army i.e. the Pre-Shadowling Occupation army was mainly composed of Heavy Skirmish Spears. It was a skirmishing army not a more versatile army. Each Spear comprises of about one hundred Trolls. There are many ways that a Spear can be organised and equipped, as detailed below.

The Troll army is lead by a Troll War-leader i.e. War-leader Strongspears, if the Trollish army is led by a Troll called Strongspears. Most Spears would ideally have a priest with assistants for healing, however due the current state of the nation this is not a regular thing at the moment. The leader of a spear is generally called 'The Cap'n' but they don't have an official name.

Heavy Infantry Spear: *The strongest unit in the army. Well equipped and well drilled, when these trolls decide to stand their ground they will. They carry shields and spears.*

Medium Infantry Spear: *The backbone of the Troll army, they comprise the majority of the army. They carry shields and spears.*

Light Infantry Spear: *The lightest armoured and most manoeuvrable of the basic Troll line troops. New troops are most likely to be placed in a light unit to gain experience. They also often are used to patrol the Troll lands. They carry shields and spears.*

Heavy Skirmish Spear: *The elite unit of the Troll army. These heavily armoured Trolls deploy on the flanks or in front of the army to soften up the enemy. They are used to fighting on their own, independently without officers. They generally carry two weapons, some carry bows occasionally.*

Light Skirmish Spear: *Like the heavy skirmishers but without the heavy armour. They generally carry two weapons, with some archers.*

Heavy Cavalry Spear: *A newfangled addition to the Troll army, these Troll warriors ride hardy young mammoths in to battle. Due to their new status there are not very many of them. They are clad in heavy armour. If they catch a unit unawares they are devastating. At first considered untested and potentially unreliable since Mara they have become a mainstay shock attack. These trolls and their mounts are a breed apart, so far no troll has needed a replacement mount as they have either died together, or survived. The bond between the troll and mammoth is said to remind some of the more learned of that between Dragon and rider in it's closeness and dedication.*

Light Cavalry Spear: *Basically the same as the heavy Spear but with out the heavy armour. They have the same limitations. They are usually in fact the same unit as the Heavy Spear but without the armour being worn.*

Archery Spear: *These trolls use great longbows. They usually have swords as a secondary weapon.*

Each Troll army is compromised of 8 spears. Six of these Spears are usually infantry / skirmishers. The other two are usually archers / cavalry. Currently the Troll army only has one Cavalry spear, half of which are lightly armoured and half of which are heavily armoured. There are three armies on paper. One at Mountain Home and the surrounding area and the other two spread out throughout the Troll Lands. The armies are not standing armies and large parts of the army are often at home tending to their families.

Notable people and places

*Stormclaw – Troll High Priest of Bronwen; this Troll has done many great deeds, not just for the Troll people, but for all of Vara.
Queen Brightstar – a Spear Maiden of Bronwen, she fought valiantly at Mara, and is now queen of the Trolls following the death of her brother, Sourbelly.*

Tink Stormclaw – sister to Stormclaw, she has been less visible to the public eye, but has done much work in bringing magic back to the Trolls, establishing a school for mages in the Troll Lands.

Mountain Home – the capital of the Troll Lands.

Altar of the Fallen – which appeared where the pyre of Sourbelly was, just outside Mountain Home.

Tatastagol – main temple to Bronwen.

Noyabrask - secondary temple of Bronwen far in the northern limits of the kingdom.

The Shard Lands – a land of harsh conditions to the east of Tatastagol.

Produce

Mineral wealth

Exotic animal parts and pelts

Production of very enduring (but not very fancy) items

A limited quantity of Star Steel items.

Real Life Inspiration:

Pathfinder Trolls are not very typical of most fantasy settings. Basically take the trappings of the Norse culture used in the Bronwen faith, make sure to base everything on the principals of 'strong and long-lasting but not decorative' and keep in mind that Trolls use strength as a first solution, as they have so much of it.

The Wyldlands

To both the north and the south of the five kingdoms lie the Wyldlands, vast areas of unexplored land that few travel and of those that do even fewer return. It is from here that marauding bands of humanoid monsters such as orcs and goblins descend, and from here the primal Wyldmen sometimes come to plague the Varan Kingdoms. Whatever lies beyond the borders of the five kingdoms remains, for now, a mystery.

Wyldman Society

Wyldman society is based around Clans, each made up of a number of family groups. They can range in size from just three or four families to the great Clans which may have several thousand members. Most of the Clans are at least semi-nomadic, moving around in order not to overuse the land's resources in any one place. The larger Clans are split into smaller groups that travel independently, with the entire Clan meeting up once or twice a year. Each Clan has a Totem animal. Their society is also based round the concept of taking a path in life, and each path also has a totem. When one undergoes the Rite of Adulthood in a certain clan you are infused with the spirit of the Clan Totem, thus gaining the benefits of your Clan; the same is true of becoming accepted as an equal in a path at the end of your apprentice period.

All Wyldmen gain the following bonus at creation, however they will have to sacrifice the ability to be in both a guild and special group; instead they may join one, and the other 'slot' is taken up with "Wyldman".

Racial Bonus: 2/2 Life Gain, +1 Strength, Normal Rage 1 +1/3 Lv. Wyldmen should be role-played as superstitious.

The Totem Paths



The Bear Path

Strength is of the utmost importance to these warriors. They are ferocious in battle, not seeming to heed their own wounds as they fight. They will continue to fight until either their enemy is defeated or they are dead.

Bear Path 2/2 Base Life Gain, "Tough as Nails" (character will not pass out at zero LF or if a critical hits zero Loc, only active when raging.)



The Path of the Stag

These warriors are independent and hone their skills so that they do not have to rely upon others. They are proud of their skills at arms and do not rely on brute force to win the day.

Stag Path BWT+1 (Training), Disarm 1/Ad, +1 DAL



The Path of the Boar

Using speed as well as skill and strength, these warriors are usually the first into the fray. They strike fast and strike hard, aiming to take their foe down quickly and move onto the next.

Boar Path Mighty Blow 2/Ad, Charge (20ft Run up, +1 Dam) 1/Ad



The Path of the Fox

Silver tongued diplomats, followers of the Fox are often advisors to the clan leaders. They are the judges and law keepers of the clan and often oversee disputes.

Fox Path Discern Lie, Zone of Truth 1/Ad



The Path of the Cat

These are the scouts, the watchers in the grass who see but rarely are seen. They are the ones who seek the secret paths and ambush spots; they can look beyond what is seen to how it can be used to advantage.

Cat Path Camouflage (Physical) 1/Ad, Ghost Walk 1/Ad



The Path of the Adder

These are the crafters and the makers, those who have spent their lives honing their skills to create things of use.

Adder Path +2 Lv of Make in 1 thing, +1 Lv of Make in a 2nd, Recognise Function



The Path of the Frog

This is the Path of the healers and potion makers, of medicines and herb-lore.

Frog Path +2 Lv of Make Curing, +2 Lv of Hedgebrew, Recognise Nature of Wounds, Recognise Disease, Recognise Plant



The Path of the Salmon

This is the Path of wisdom, followed by those who hold the knowledge of the history of the clan. They are the keepers of the ancestor tales, the keepers of the lore.

Salmon Path +2 Lv of Lore



The Path of the Owl

This Path is only followed by women shamans and mystics who are the keepers of the female mysteries, speakers to the matriarchal ancestors and leaders of the women's rites.

Owl Path +2 Lv of Art in Faith, +1 Lv of Art in All, +1 Level of Lore



The Path of the Crane

This Path is only followed by men shamans and mystics who are the keepers of the male mysteries, speakers to the patriarchal ancestors and leaders of the men's rites.

Crane Path +2 Lv of Art in Faith, +1 Lv of Art in All, +1 Level of Lore

The Clans

Benefits of Clan do stack with benefits of Path.



Swan, clan of the makers.

Swan Clan are the richest clan, they always find something industrious to do with their time, and frequently have the most skilled artisans. Anything you buy from the Swan Clan will serve you well and last longer than if you bought it from anyone else.

Swan Clan +2 Lv of Make in 1 thing, +1 Lv of Make in a 2nd, 1/1 Life Loss



Bull, clan of the fertile

Bull Clan are the most prolific, both in terms of numbers and in terms of produce; their small villages will have farms that provide them with excess food for trade. They live larger, drink heartier, stand taller and fight harder than any other clan. Only a trait of stubbornness and quick temper keep them in check as they are slower to adapt to changing situations.

Bull Clan 1/1 Base Life Gain, 10ft Knockback (5 mins) 1/Ad



Hawk, clan of the singers and tale tellers

Hawk Clan are the heart and history of the Wyldmen; their shaman's teach through tales of the past. Their scouts are famed for seeing further and their warriors prefer decisive quick fights rather than drawn out brawls.

Hawk Clan Spirit of the Light 1/Ad, Eyes of the Eagle 1/Ad



Raven, clan of the healers

Raven Clan are looked down on by some of the other clans, as they prize care for the sick rather than the ability to survive. However the Shamans of Raven Clan also know the skills and tricks of dealing with the undead which other clans do not.

Raven Clan Dress Minor, Dress Major +1 Lv of Make Curing, -1 Rage (So lose base Wyldman Rage)



Eagle, clan of the wise

Eagle Clan respect knowledge and wisdom. They will defer to the eldest or the most experienced when dealing with problems. Eagle Clan Shamans are renowned as the wisest of all the Shamans.

Eagle Clan +2 Lv of Lore, Discern Truth (you can spot when something is being omitted)



Hare, clan of the canny and strong

Hare Clan are known for their ingenuity and planning; they hunt some of the most dangerous game in the Wyldlands using tricks and traps. They also pride themselves on being tough enough to endure when their plans go awry or fail.

Hare Clan Lightning Strike/Reactions 1/Ad, Discern Traps, +1 Lv of Make Traps, 1/1 Life Gain



Horse, clan of the restless

Horse Clan are wanderers; they maintain a much more nomadic life than the other clan and cannot seem to stay in one place for more than a month. They follow where the wind takes them.

Horse Clan +1 DAL, Live to Additional -1 LF



Wolf, clan of the clan-less

Wolf Clan is not a clan per-sae, in fact it is made up of all those who have been exiled from their birth clan, or those born outside of the other clans. As such most of the Wyldmen encountered in the years before the last Shadowling war were groups from this clan. When you are exiled a rite is performed which will strip you of the spirit of your clan.

Wolf Clan Basic Wyldman Benefits

Real Life Inspiration:

Watch a Conan movie, or any other barbarian based fantasy film or book. The Wyldlands are brutal and savage.

The Inland Sea & The Fists of Bronwen

There is a lot of trade between kingdoms on the Inland Sea. There are also several islands that don't come under the rule of any of the kingdoms, nor under the rule of Kiral. They are subject to High King's Law, and the general populace has the assumption that Kiral has jurisdiction over them. These islands are populated by highly independent people, who cherish personal freedom, but pay for it with ongoing conflict with the lawless pirates of the Inland Sea.

The Pirates of the inland sea are based out of a lawless island chain somewhere between Amatukiland and the duchy of Kiral; the chain is known as "The Fists of Bronwen".

There is a saying on Vara for those that like to kill and steal, or who are without morals; they are said to 'ride a red sea'. The archipelago boasts a few coastal ports, and the chief port has formidable defences. The Pirates dress in flamboyant clothes, often the spoils of their raids such as sun-spider silks and similar.

Art users are always well received once they have proven their loyalty to the ship. Indeed many a mage of slack morals has found a profitable career as a pirate mage, for as long as they evade the gibbet, their ability to damage and therefore stop a ship at range makes them invaluable, and if they take the time to create wands with combat spells on them, well not a few ships have fallen to a mage captain leading a boarding action with a wand in each hand blasting the deck clear of opposition to his crew.

Some of the pirates operate by raiding ships and coastal villages; others work as smugglers and couriers of illegal goods and people. The ransoming of captives is common; while the navies of many of the kingdoms arrive to protect shipping, none are prepared to risk the damages of an assault on the island ports.

Pirates and sailors tend to eschew armour for obvious reasons, leather being the heaviest they employ; they rely more on dexterity and skill at arms than on physical protection.

Notable People

Captain Elizabeth Jennison of the Sunspray – a highly independent ships captain, she is possibly the only captain on Vara to currently understand deep sea navigation, as she was involved in the voyage taken from First Light not long before the 3rd Battle of Mara.

Real Life Inspiration:

Take the Pirates of the Caribbean, add in some good old Errol Flynn swashbuckling mayhem, and you get the Fists of Bronwen.

The Renraniay, the Free People of Vara

The Renraniay are a race of human nomads that make their lives travelling and trading; they dress in bright silks and tough leathers and cottons. They travel in bright wagons; most villages view them with wonder and suspicion, for their fortune tellers are known to be unnervingly accurate.

Of anywhere on Vara their fortifications at Mara are the closest thing to a permanent home. Gifted to them by Sethain after the battle, the fortifications have remained intact and are now open to any who wish to stay there, provided that they abide by the rules set down by the Renraniay: that no person may be turned away, no one shall go hungry, and that all there look after each other. Fights, if there are any, are overseen by someone and that is the end of the matter, otherwise all personal disputes are to be left at the gate.

Notable People

Callis – King of the Renraniay.

Real Life Inspiration:

The inspiration for these people is the literary ideals of the Romanies; no offence is meant and this should be role-played with a degree of sensitivity.

The Lands Outside of Vara

In recent years it has become known that they are lands outside of Vara across the great seas. Some travellers from those lands have come to Vara and while the general population knows little of them, some tales are starting to circulate, particularly in learned circles.

Those with high enough Lore skill may have heard of the following places:

The Crystal Empire

The Calymnae

The Western Pirates

Ryutengawajima