Wisdom of the Drylanders

By Peter Nuttall (Brax, Brax@athas.org)

Authors: Brax, Will Kendrick (Kenku Wisdom, eyeoftheghost@yahoo.com), Neeva Barrens (Elven Wisdom)

Editing and Review: Chris Flipse (flip@athas.org)

Interior Layout: Chris Flipse (flip@athas.org)

Cover Illustrator: Stephen James

Interior Illustrator: Neeva Barrens

Interior 3D Art: Nelson Baietti Miguel Pimentel (nelsonbaietti@yahoo.com)

Copyright 2002,2006 © Peter Nuttall, Wizards of the Coast

Table of Contents:

WELCOME TO THE SCHOOL OF SPIES ................................................................. 4

WISDOM OF STRENGTH ....................................................................................... 6

WISDOM OF BETTERS .......................................................................................... 7

COMMON WISDOM ............................................................................................... 10

DWARVEN WISDOM ............................................................................................. 16

ELVEN WISDOM ................................................................................................... 20

WISDOM OF THE TREMBLING PLAIN ................................................................. 23

KENKU WISDOM .................................................................................................. 27

WISDOM OF TERROR ............................................................................................. 32

WISDOM OF THE STORM COAST ...................................................................... 40

APPENDIX: SKILLS, FEATS AND PRESTIGE CLASSES ..................................... 44
Legal Notice:

Dungeons and Dragons®, D&D, and Dark Sun® are registered trademarks of Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. This Dark Sun on-line product has been recognized by Wizards of the Coast as an Official Dark Sun release on the Internet. The content here in is considered to be derivative work (as it is based on the intellectual property owned by Wizards of the Coast), and the articles within are jointly owned by both Wizards of the Coast and their authors. As such neither can do anything outside the official website without the permission of the other. This project may be reproduced for personal use, but may not be used to generate revenue. This product is a work of fiction. Any similarity to actual people, organizations, places, or events is purely coincidental.

Open Game Content and Dark Sun Copyrights:

This edition of Wisdom of the Drylanders is produced under version 1.0, 1.0a, and/or draft versions of the Open Game License, the d20 System Trademark Logo Guide, and System Reference Document by permission of Wizards of the Coast. Subsequent versions of this product will incorporate final versions of the license, guide, and document.

Designation of Product Identity: The following items are hereby designated as Product Identity in accordance with Section 1(e) of the Open Game License, version 1.0a: Any and all Wizards of the Coast logos and identifying marks and trade dress, including all Wizards of the Coast product and product line names including but not limited to Dark Sun, The City-state of Tyr, Dune Trader, Elves of Athas, Veiled Alliance, and any specific characters, monsters, creatures, and places; capitalized names and names of places, magical or psionic items, artifacts, characters, countries, creatures, geographic locations, gods, historic events, magic items, organizations, spells, and powers; and any and all stories, storylines, histories, plots, thematic elements, and dialogue; all spells monsters in the Monstrous Compendium Appendix: Terrors Beyond Tyr; and all artwork, symbols, designs, depictions, illustrations, maps, and cartography, likenesses, poses, logos, or graphic designs, except such elements that already appear in final or draft versions of the d20 System Reference Document (e.g. Nystul, Melf, Bigby, Tenser, Mordenkainen, Leomund, Tasha, Evard, Otiluke, Rary, Drawmij, and Otto) and are already Open Game Content by virtue of appearing there. The above Product Identity is not Open Game Content.

Designation of Open Game Content: Some portions of this book which are OGC originate from the System Reference Document and are ©1999, 2000, and 2001 Wizards of the Coast, Inc. "Open Game Content is designated in this adventure by text appearing in this color. Any other portion of this adventure, unless already appearing in the System Reference Document or already Wizards' of the Coast intellectual property, is joint property of Wizard of the Coast and the author."
Wisdom of the Drylanders contains cultural and role-playing material for the Dark Sun campaign setting. Other than this introduction, this entire work is written from the point of view of Kurnan NPCs, mostly master spies working for King Oronis of Kurn. Kurn's "school of spies" is an organization of Kurnan spies that studies non-Kurnan societies, and brings back information to defend Kurn and improve its way of life.

For obvious reasons, Kurnans refer to outsiders, particularly people from the tablelands, as "Drylanders." Obviously, this document should not be considered the total intelligence report of Kurrn's spy organization; these articles are only part of one of the many training manuals for new and prospective spies. In Kurn, inexpensive paper is harvested from local domesticated wasps; as a result most Kurnan paper tends to be stiff and card-like. Hence, Kurnans tend not to bind their written works into books, or to roll up their writing in scrolls, but rather keep loose cards in collections. It is not unusual for cards in a collection to be re-written or replaced, or for an author to add cards to a deck that he has already circulated.

The "Wisdom" articles focus heavily on the language and culture of different "drylander" groups. Kurnans are a very different people than the rest of Athasians. Since they do not participate in the slave trade with the tablelands, Kurnans do not natively speak what people in the tablelands refer to as the "Common" tongue. The seven cities of the Tablelands banned reading and writing to the common people for generations, while in Kurn, literacy has always been fostered and encouraged. In Kurn, all citizens and even most slaves have a basic reading vocabulary of at least a thousand word-symbols, and can paint their own names. The Kurnan written (or rather "painted") language adapts the Eldaarish word-symbols, which are called "picts." Note that pict's are an ideographic system like hieroglyphics, where one symbol corresponds to one word. If possible, Kurnans prefer to use at least two colors while painting their words, in order to get across the proper emphasis; or to quote. In order to represent words in "Drylander" languages such as the Common speech, the Kurnan spies tend to use dwarven Letters since in Kurn, the only persons who natively use those that letter form, are dwarves. In the Tablelands, they are simply called "the alphabet," or "Tyrian letters."

Contents

The articles in this document are only a few cards of the Wisdom of the Drylanders collection. The training of spies lasts for years; this document represents only a few of the most interesting and useful cards:

"Welcome to the School of Spies" by the master of the school of spies, King Oronis of Kurn; a critical explanation of the purpose of the Wisdom of the Drylanders collection.

Wisdom of Strength by Spymaster Meret – proverbs & folklore of the Tablelands; discussion of "civic virtues."

Wisdom of Betters by Spymaster Meret – discussion of power, social class, and morality in the Tablelands.

Common Wisdom by Spymaster Meret – discussion of the Common speech, its popular expressions and insults.

Dwarven Wisdom by Spymaster Klianis – discussion of Athasian Dwarves, their language, culture, and eccentricities.

Elven Wisdom by Spymaster Kalisvrani – discussion of Athasian elves, their language, culture, and eccentricities.

Wisdom of the Trembling Plains by Spymaster Andapho — discussion of the vast area known as the Trembling Plains, its herder clans, and why the area deserves closer attention.

Kenku Wisdom by Spymaster Andapho -- an account of observation of mysterious Athasian Kenku, their culture, isolation, motives, and tactics.

Wisdom of Terror by Prodigy, a veteran spy -- an illumination of the unfathomed lands of Eldhaarih, its people, culture, and politics.

Wisdom of The Storm Coast by Spymaster Meret—updating Wisdom of Terror, discussing South Guard and Fort Mudwatch, and suggesting how one swift military strike could reduce the Dim Lands to starvation.
Welcome to the School of Spies

My friend,

The cards before you will take you on a journey into the minds of the Drylanders, a journey that for your safety you should take before you depart into the dry lands. These cards sum up the wisdom won by many daring spies, not all of whom returned to paint their own tales. But because of this wisdom won by blood and cunning, you will travel into the dry lands armed with knowledge, and return alive to paint new cards into this deck. Each generation of spies goes into the dry lands more prepared than the last. And none has been as well-armed as you.

This deck is enough to prepare you, but there is a word for you before you go:
Know yourself.

But before you peer out into the dust I would have you gaze into the reflection of your own Kurnan eyes. You cannot fully unlock the wisdom contained in these cards until you comprehend the elements that make you Kurnan. Allow me to tell you about yourself, and never again take your upbringing for granted:

You call your king Oronis, not The King or King Oronis. Your fellow Kurnans do not speak of Oronis any more deferentially in front of his templars; he is Oronis, that is enough. Only some Kurnan nobles cling to archaic Titles — a Drylander word for expressions that proclaim that someone is more important than the rest of his name allows. You call the templars and your clave-chiefs by their names, granting them respect not according to their title, but the ancient elven name. You humor your king, but your parents have taught you what you are.

You have learned that to be wealthy is to live between walls of stone, and to be wretched is to live within a paper tent, but the most wretched folk that you see have not known hunger, nor have they considered selling their son to a Tyrian fleshmonger. The wealthiest nobles that you know of never indulge in extravagant waste, like the Nibenese merchant who pours out his mug of broy upon the sand in front of a wide-eyed thirsty beggar child.

You think that slavery means being denied the rights of citizenship because of some act or incapacity to carry out one's duties of citizenship, being forced to work in exchange for food and shelter, and being told when to rise and when to sleep. Yet slavery among you is more bound than binding. Kurnan nobles complain more about Kurnan slavery laws than their slaves do. Your nobles are forbidden to buy or sell slaves, except with the templars, who will cease to sell slaves to cruel or neglectful masters. It is not lawful for the slave-owner to lie with the slave. Each slave has a week of every month to study with the templars, and any honest slave who learns to read and use the longbow may purchase freedom and win citizenship. The children of Kurnan slaves do not become property of the master. Drylander elves and merchant houses have painfully learned that enslaving a single Kurnan citizen means declaring war on Oronis. You will smile at a stranger's child, and the children of your friends and kin are like your brothers play, it was not out of fear that your parents told you to watch your little sister bear a child, and never again take your upbringing for granted:

You call your king Oronis, not The King or King Oronis. Your fellow Kurnans do not speak of Oronis any more deferentially in front of his templars; he is Oronis, that is enough. Only some Kurnan nobles cling to archaic Titles — a Drylander word for expressions that proclaim that someone is more important than the rest of his name allows. You call the templars and your clave-chiefs by their names, granting them respect not according to their title, but the ancient elven name. You humor your king, but your parents have taught you what you are.

You have learned that to be wealthy is to live between walls of stone, and to be wretched is to live within a paper tent, but the most wretched folk that you see have not known hunger, nor have they considered selling their son to a Tyrian fleshmonger. The wealthiest nobles that you know of never indulge in extravagant waste, like the Nibenese merchant who pours out his mug of broy upon the sand in front of a wide-eyed thirsty beggar child.

You think that slavery means being denied the rights of citizenship because of some act or incapacity to carry out one's duties of citizenship, being forced to work in exchange for food and shelter, and being told when to rise and when to sleep. Yet slavery among you is more bound than binding. Kurnan nobles complain more about Kurnan slavery laws than their slaves do. Your nobles are forbidden to buy or sell slaves, except with the templars, who will cease to sell slaves to cruel or neglectful masters. It is not lawful for the slave-owner to lie with the slave. Each slave has a week of every month to study with the templars, and any honest slave who learns to read and use the longbow may purchase freedom and win citizenship. The children of Kurnan slaves do not become property of the master. Drylander elves and merchant houses have painfully learned that enslaving a single Kurnan citizen means declaring war on Oronis. You will smile at a stranger's child, and the children of your friends and kin are like your brothers play, it was not out of fear that your parents told you to watch your little sister bear a child, and never again take your upbringing for granted:

You call your king Oronis, not The King or King Oronis. Your fellow Kurnans do not speak of Oronis any more deferentially in front of his templars; he is Oronis, that is enough. Only some Kurnan nobles cling to archaic Titles — a Drylander word for expressions that proclaim that someone is more important than the rest of his name allows. You call the templars and your clave-chiefs by their names, granting them respect not according to their title, but the ancient elven name. You humor your king, but your parents have taught you what you are.

You have learned that to be wealthy is to live between walls of stone, and to be wretched is to live within a paper tent, but the most wretched folk that you see have not known hunger, nor have they considered selling their son to a Tyrian fleshmonger. The wealthiest nobles that you know of never indulge in extravagant waste, like the Nibenese merchant who pours out his mug of broy upon the sand in front of a wide-eyed thirsty beggar child.

You think that slavery means being denied the rights of citizenship because of some act or incapacity to carry out one's duties of citizenship, being forced to work in exchange for food and shelter, and being told when to rise and when to sleep. Yet slavery among you is more bound than binding. Kurnan nobles complain more about Kurnan slavery laws than their slaves do. Your nobles are forbidden to buy or sell slaves, except with the templars, who will cease to sell slaves to cruel or neglectful masters. It is not lawful for the slave-owner to lie with the slave. Each slave has a week of every month to study with the templars, and any honest slave who learns to read and use the longbow may purchase freedom and win citizenship. The children of Kurnan slaves do not become property of the master. Drylander elves and merchant houses have painfully learned that enslaving a single Kurnan citizen means declaring war on Oronis. You will smile at a stranger's child, and the children of your friends and kin are like your brothers play, it was not out of fear that your parents told you to watch your little sister bear a child, and never again take your upbringing for granted:

You call your king Oronis, not The King or King Oronis. Your fellow Kurnans do not speak of Oronis any more deferentially in front of his templars; he is Oronis, that is enough. Only some Kurnan nobles cling to archaic Titles — a Drylander word for expressions that proclaim that someone is more important than the rest of his name allows. You call the templars and your clave-chiefs by their names, granting them respect not according to their title, but the ancient elven name. You humor your king, but your parents have taught you what you are.

You have learned that to be wealthy is to live between walls of stone, and to be wretched is to live within a paper tent, but the most wretched folk that you see have not known hunger, nor have they considered selling their son to a Tyrian fleshmonger. The wealthiest nobles that you know of never indulge in extravagant waste, like the Nibenese merchant who pours out his mug of broy upon the sand in front of a wide-eyed thirsty beggar child.

You think that slavery means being denied the rights of citizenship because of some act or incapacity to carry out one's duties of citizenship, being forced to work in exchange for food and shelter, and being told when to rise and when to sleep. Yet slavery among you is more bound than binding. Kurnan nobles complain more about Kurnan slavery laws than their slaves do. Your nobles are forbidden to buy or sell slaves, except with the templars, who will cease to sell slaves to cruel or neglectful masters. It is not lawful for the slave-owner to lie with the slave. Each slave has a week of every month to study with the templars, and any honest slave who learns to read and use the longbow may purchase freedom and win citizenship. The children of Kurnan slaves do not become property of the master. Drylander elves and merchant houses have painfully learned that enslaving a single Kurnan citizen means declaring war on Oronis. You will smile at a stranger's child, and the children of your friends and kin are like your brothers play, it was not out of fear that your parents told you to watch your little sister bear a child, and never again take your upbringing for granted:

You call your king Oronis, not The King or King Oronis. Your fellow Kurnans do not speak of Oronis any more deferentially in front of his templars; he is Oronis, that is enough. Only some Kurnan nobles cling to archaic Titles — a Drylander word for expressions that proclaim that someone is more important than the rest of his name allows. You call the templars and your clave-chiefs by their names, granting them respect not according to their title, but the ancient elven name. You humor your king, but your parents have taught you what you are.

You have learned that to be wealthy is to live between walls of stone, and to be wretched is to live within a paper tent, but the most wretched folk that you see have not known hunger, nor have they considered selling their son to a Tyrian fleshmonger. The wealthiest nobles that you know of never indulge in extravagant waste, like the Nibenese merchant who pours out his mug of broy upon the sand in front of a wide-eyed thirsty beggar child.
than one man. You wonder that there would be need for such a word! Yet you make allowances for the wives of infertile husbands. For this reason the men in your community speak curtly to Drylander humans. The rumor among you is that it is easier for a woman to conceive a healthy child with a Drylander than with a Kurnan. You only apply the word *dally* to the actions of an *indiscreet* wife. If a Kurnan man were to *dally* with a Drylander woman, he would become a *traitor* in your eyes – not only to his wife but to his clave and to the larger community of Kurn, and you would be understanding of the jealous wife that slew such a husband. Your word *dally* does not even apply to the woman who discreetly trysts a single time with a Drylander. Though this act is common, you have no word for this act, for you have been taught not to notice it.

Your selective blindness passes for naiveté, but your people are more indifferent than naive. In your waxed-linen clave tents shared by forty fellow clavers, it is politeness, not naiveté, to pretend you know nothing of the impotence of the clave-chief’s new husband, the gambling losses of your uncle, the sixth consecutive miscarriage of a claver that you dislike. The fact that you have petitioned to serve as Oronis’ spy shows you to be more curious and meddlesome than the average Kurnan. You have always noted and pieced together unspoken details, and communicated knowledge to other curious ones through hints and innuendoes. Your slower, less curious friends were left behind, because you were loathe to repeat yourself, or to explain anything straightforwardly.

As sharp as you are, you have begun to observe danger in what you perceive as the dullness of your fellow Kurnans. You have wished that Oronis would take a greater share in the government of the city, would set all things aright. It is perhaps for this reason that you have petitioned to serve him, to call his attention to the problems that he has somehow neglected.

You may think, for example, that the Drylanders are taking advantage of your people. Indeed, accustomed to plenty, Kurnans make poor bargains, and lose their purses to the elves at dice. Only the high walls and remoteness of Kurn, and the machinations of shrewd templars keep the naiveté of Kurn from passing into a Drylander by-word. Perhaps it bothers you that your fellow Kurnans would rather sell the fruits of their labors for a song, rather than let a single berry rot on their shelves. Rather than admiring your people’s thrift and respect for the gifts of the land, you are angered that foreigners should take advantage of them.

You may also have ideas of increasing the wealth of Kurn; you have heard, for example, a rumor of gold discovered in the stream near Fort Protector. You have heard that the mountain fungus that long ago produced the rich blue dye that coveted by Drylanders, is not in fact extinct, but thrives in some hidden valley in the White Mountains. Whether true or false, such rumors must be extinguished. Kurn’s poverty in metal and other loot protects it more than its high walls, its arrows, its magic. Poverty is our greatest defense.

Our greatest weapon is knowledge. As the templars taught you reading and archery as a child, in this school you will be armed with knowledge of the Drylanders. You will not only learn the tongues of the Drylanders; you will learn to speak to them, to deal with them, to steer them like stupid beasts, to pass as one of them. Armed with knowledge, you will go forth with the blessing of Oronis, to enrich your land and people with the *Wisdom of the Drylanders*.

Welcome to the school of spies.

-Oronis
Wisdom of Strength

As children of Kurn, we often heard stories and fables that were composed for our amusement and edification. As adults, we can look back on these stories and see how they were constructed to teach us what we call civic virtues: restraint, patience, generosity, discipline, wisdom. These are the virtues that make us Kurnan.

Stories told to the children of the dry lands reflect a very different set of virtues. As you must pass for a Drylander, I want you to listen to these stories with the mind of a child:

The Beginning

On the eve of the age of kings, the Dragon destroyed the land, sea, and the sky. The sky was filled with stars, until the dragon swallowed most of them, leaving only the brightest. The sun was a brilliant yellow fire in the sky, until the Dragon burnt it to a red ember. The sea was full of water, until the Dragon sucked it dry and breathed dust into the place of the waters. The land was full of cities, trees, wells and grass, until the Dragon began to gnaw, and it gnawed until almost none were left. Gorged, Dragon lifted its head, and saw that a few cities, fields, and wells remained in distant pockets on the land. But as it reached out its claws to devour the last city, a great slumber came over the beast. Thanks to the power of the seven Kings, it has slept for many ages, and will sleep for ages more, if you do not wake it with your crying about your hungry belly.

Here in the last cities, the weak bow before the strong. If you do not like the way of things in the city, then leave. Walk away from these city walls, and see if the eaten lands are more to your liking.

The Elven Brothers

Two elven brothers returned from a hunt to find that their tribe had packed up and left them stranded in the desert.

The water hole had only six days of water left, so the elder, stronger brother gathered the water into skins, and gave three days worth to his younger, weaker brother. With the water, they sprinted after the tracks of their tribe.

They traveled for four days, never catching up to their tribe. Each day, the younger, weaker brother drank his fill of water, while the older, stronger brother only drank half rations, looking with disapproval at his brother's gluttony. On the morning of the fourth day, as the younger brother drained the final drops from his water skins, the older brother finally spoke:

“It may be days more until we catch up to our tribe, brother. I have saved my water, though it cost me discipline and sacrifice. You have drunk your water and have no more. Now your gluttony will be your downfall.”

“Not so, brother,” replied the younger, drawing his dagger. “My water packs have been lighter the past three days, and my body is refreshed from its fill of water. You are tired from carrying your load, and weak from deprivation. Now I am the stronger.”

Proverbs of the Dry Lands

“The beast snarls. The snake hisses. The stranger smiles. Take warning!”

“Birth is painful. Life is short. Death is forever.”

“You cannot quench the hunger of a fire, the thirst of a desert, or the greed of a templar.”

“The cat worm forgives the paw.”

“The locusts share no king, yet the desert trembles before their bands.”

“The spider takes bold with her hands, and spins her webs in kings' palaces.”

“Better to be clever than to be thought clever.”

“Spit boldly in the slave's face, but spit quietly into the templar's cup.”

“The elements reclaim us all, but better you than me.”

“An open wound attracts flies.”

Lessons from Strength

So what have you learned, my child? Can you set aside Kurnan notions of fairness, to enter a world where strength is the only virtue, where might makes right, where laws are painted with the sword rather than the brush? And having done so, will you remember Kurnan notions of right and wrong when you come home to us? Settle this in your mind, sister, that you will do what is necessary to survive in the dry lands. But remember who you are. Go forth and learn, but return and live.

-Spymaster Mereth
Wisdom of the Drylanders v2

A Word on the Common Speech

When you report to me, I will refine your skills in the most widely spoken language in the seven cities: the common speech. Before you leave my instruction, you must learn fluency in common and some appreciation of its subtleties. Because of the importance of this language to virtually all missions and all spies, I will provide you with two cards on this subject.

This first card will prepare you for my course, where you will read your first original text in the common speech: the B’slav’sek codex, which is titled Slave Tribes. My second card, Common Wisdom, advances our discussion of the common speech and what I call the common culture of the six cities. My second card will assume that you have read this first card, and that you have thoroughly studied B’slav’sek. One of your sister spies recently obtained the B’slav’sek codex in Nibenay and transported it to our school at great risk.

We cannot verify the identity of B’slav’sek’s narrator, since we purchased the codex from a dubious elven Drylander named B’slav’sek. But the descriptions of slavery in the seven cities are true to our experiences. To help you understand B’slav’sek, I will outline the Drylander structure of betters:

The Drylander Structure of Betters

Tempars

In terms of food, shelter, possessions, legal rights, and personal power, templars live at least as well as the freeborn artisans, and the most powerful Templars far exceed the richest of nobles. And yet the highest dry lands templar is the object of contempt from everyone that they know. Their sovereign uses them as disposable slaves; the nobles sneer at them, slaves spit in their footsteps when their backs are turned; and their fellow templars despise them most of all. Templars are the butt of the harshest jokes of the dry lands, and other Drylanders submit to them only when templars invoke the terrors of their office. Few slaves or freemen are so unwise as to insult templars to their faces, but sullen obedience, averted eyes, and other not-so-subtle messages convey their derision in clear tones. Templars respond to this general contempt with arrogance, aggression, gaudiness, and pretentious dignity, but everyone knows that templar privileges are unearned and fleeting. Privileges such as literacy set templars apart as disposable instruments.

A contact of a junior spy stationed near Urik describes the templars as broken men.

Drylanders focus the inseparable powers of reading and management into one hated, contemptible office, and blame the templars for the inevitable abuses of power. Without templars, the dry lands cities fall into anarchy. Tyr succeeded in ridding itself of slavery at great cost, but failed to rid itself of the Templarate.

Unskilled slaves

The lowest of the low, unskilled slaves perform backbreaking, dirty tasks, every day of their miserable lives. But do not be misled: many who are called slaves in the Seven Cities are not considered the lowest of the low. The child of a Drylander slave is automatically the property of the Drylander master, but in other respects, some Drylands slaves are treated much as Kurnan slaves: as weak-minded or irresponsible involuntary workers; not as disposable possessions.

In the Balican and Raamin fields and mines, of course, it is clear who is free and who is slave. But in Raam and Balic itself, slaves are generally called Servants, and are considered the Betters of a free unskilled laborer. Before the death of Ablach-Re and the chaos that followed, this was particularly true in Raam, where the caste system superseded the issue of slave or free. Raamin Viziers, artisans, laborers, or untouchables may all be slave or free, since no self-respecting Vizier could keep a personal house servant who was of a lower caste. (This has changed lately with the Raam civil war; many Raamin servants have been seized by M’ke and other factions who treat them as disposable instruments.)

The notion of Better slaves applies to Guln native slaves, some house slaves of the Drylander nobility, and to Nibenese artisan-slaves and soldier-slaves. In my next card, common Wisdom, I will focus on the culture of the common slaves who are bought, sold, and treated like cattle. The concubines and personal slaves of templars may receive more food, but the mistreatment they receive from other slaves compensates for this. Lackeys that are known to collaborate or inform the templars, receive even crueler treatment. Slaves are most harsh with those slaves who take on qualities that remind them of templars, such as reading, authority, magical ability — slaves hate the very idea of their own rising above them.

Unskilled free day-laborers (Freemen)

Free day-laborers either are ex-slaves, or refugees from the drying and destroyed towns that dot the dry lands. They starve or steal during slow seasons, and stand daily in places designated for employment — any sort of employment. Nobles often require short-term labor for planting, harvest, or other back-
breaking tasks, and pay a ceramic bit per day, plus food and water, for sunrise-to-sunset work. One bit is enough to feed a child for a day, if it is not stolen, drunk or gambled away. Day laborers are usually freemen, not freeborn, and this is an important distinction for most Drylanders. Female ex-slaves who bear freeborn children often pay to have them apprenticed to freeborn artisan families.

Artisan Slaves
In Balic, prestige lines between freeborn and slave are blurred in service to the patricians, but in Tyr, Urik, and Nibenay, there is a clear line between slave and free artisans. Artisan slaves include those who perform tasks that require training, and that carry some degree of prestige. Artisan slaves cling to these skills that make them better than the unskilled slaves and freemen, whom they frequently call commoners.

Skill prestige arbitrarily varies from city to city. For example, gladiators, soldiers, and courtesans are all considered skilled artisans in Urik, but not in Draj, where these are considered common skills. In my next card, I will discuss this complex and fascinating word in detail.

Freeborn Artisans
Freeborn artisans jealously preserve their skill, referring to these skills as a craft or mystery. Unable to own land (only nobles own land in the six cities), Freeborn artisans know that preserving the secret of their craft is all that separates them from slavery and destitution. They despise artisan slaves, and prefer to take apprentices from the freeborn. Freeborn artisans are generally the least superstitious, least hysterical, most moral, and most judgmental of the Drylanders. They work for a living, as their own masters. Only the most lazy and corrupt among them leave to become tempars. As Kurnans you will find Freeborn artisans the easiest to understand, since their family craft operations superficially resemble our own Clave industries. Artisans are the source of Drylander morality. Slaves are bred for profit, commoners and tempars cut to bring a moment of pleasure to a hateful existence, nobles and Traders marry for alliance; but generally only the freeborn artisans marry for love, and remain faithfully married. The most skilled Freeborn title themselves master artisans, a title that continues to grow in prestige. Psionics schools tend to fall into the artisan caste, although these organizations are not based on family, master psions clearly borrow the term from the artisans.

Sadly, in their dedication to their particular mystery, Drylander artisans and mindbenders shun skills that would give them power: as reading, writing, and magic. Artisans do not object to mindbenders in their midst, but are incensed by the very idea of a master wizard. Our spies in Tyr report that when Tyrian council voted to proclaim preserver magic a legal craft, artisans rioted and stoned reputed wizards behind the council building.

Servants and Stewards
Although they are usually slaves by law, Stewards are often considered part of the noble family, and even more often, are literally family. Since nobles only marry other nobles, nobility itself would have fallen to inbreeding ages ago if noblewomen did not frequently bear children from their discreet matches with the help. Stewards and house servants are quick to see opportunities in relationships with their owners, in spite of the frequently mortal risk of offending noble spouses.

Raamins and Balicans, whose noble families control whole districts of the city, often downplay the distinction between Slave and Free. Most citizens, from the nobles to the slaves, are bound to a noble house with a strong head of the family. This head (called the vizier in Raam, or the patrician in Balic) is obeyed without question — it is considered more acceptable to kill the family head over a disagreement than to express that disagreement publicly!

Honored slaves such as stewards, or soldier-slaves that rise to officer ranks, have been known to accumulate property and to put on airs. Some Nibenese noble houses have left all real power and practical decisions in the hands of house stewards, and more than one Nibenese noble has fallen ill to bad food after disagreements with the help.

Traders
These inter-city travelers are prohibited citizenship in all seven cities, but frequently lease city buildings from nobles, and hold land within a day’s travel of the city. Hold, not own, since force is the only basis of legal ownership in the lawless wild. Traders are foreigners to every city and town. The eldest trade houses have whole languages and societies of their own. Dependent on the goodwill of the cities, Traders must work closely with artisans, templars, and nobles, so they often learn the language of each in order to gain
social advantage. Nobles and traders frequently exchange loans, and have been known to occasionally intermarry for the sake of alliance—nobles consider such alliances beneath them, but not so much that a saving Trade house alliance would not be worth Undermarrying a third or fourth child. Trade houses pay dearly for such prestigious alliances, typically covenanting not to purchase goods from rival noble houses.

Nobles
Like Kurnan nobles, Drylander nobles live from the labors of others on their own lands. In most of the seven cities, these nobles are the only property-owners; there are no small farms, and no other large industries to compete with them. Nobles run the industries that range from farming, to the mining of Balican silver and lead, to the quarries and brickyards in Urik. Generally, if a large industry is within a day’s travel from the city, nobles or templars probably own it; if farther away, then it is owned by a king, a trade house, or a tribe.

Nobles flatter themselves with traditions of names, titles, and descent. Noble _titling_ systems vary from city to city, so few freemen or slaves grasp which precise titles and names a given addresser should call a given noble in a given situation. Again, common speech comes to your rescue. Since nobles rarely speak directly to slaves or freemen, and since their Stewards will find ways of making you feel foolish even if you got the names and titles right, simply referring to a noble as lord should suffice. In the unlikely event that a noble talks to you directly, and wants you to reply to her, great one should do the trick.

Wisdom of the Drylanders v2
Like our own stolid nobles, Drylander nobles almost never look beyond their own interests and land. They are prohibited from traveling (the kings probably fear they would make inter-city allegiances that would compromise the power of the templars and crown). For example, some trade houses such as Vordon and Shom seem to have originated as noble houses whose lands were seized as they made foreign allegiances.

Those noble houses that have survived ages of templar intrigue and jealousy, can be said to both profit and suffer from a narrow, inbred cunning. Within their own city-states, they outwit the very templars, and yet all of their wisdom dries out at the edges of their city’s verdant belt. Eight years ago, as Urikite forces marched on their city, Tyrian nobles squabbled and bickered over their obligations to support the war, as if oblivious to the threat of Hamanu’s armies to their own lands and persons! The sheer narrowness of the noble mind is best summed up by the words of a young Nibenese noble who had broken an edict of his king, slaying a peer over some hotheaded love story. His servant (one of our spies) attempted to persuade him to flee to Raam. Facing penalty of death if he remained in his city, this noble retorted: _there is no world outside the Nibenese lands._

You probably smile at that late young noble’s naiveté. Save such smiles until you return safely. You are going into a land of madness, where absurdity and irony are as common as dust and sunshine. I bless you that you may master their madness, and return to us as the sane sister that we knew.

- Spymaster Mereth
Common Wisdom

Foreward

Since my discussion builds upon the matter and manner of the B'slav’sek codex, I strongly recommend that you peruse this document before reading further. Certainly my discussion will confuse you if you have not achieved a rudimentary grasp of common. No language, indeed, no skill, even your knowledge of the Way, is as critical to your mission as a mastery of the common speech.

Reading and Writing in the Drylands.

Your sisters teach you to read common because reading helps you to acquire fluency, but in the field, you must obviously hide your reading skill! Study the B’slav’sek and Wanderer codices. These texts represent a rare opportunity to study native use of common, before you go out into the field, where you must pass for a native.

Once in the field, you will have few opportunities to read common. As you know, in the dry lands, only templars and nobles can read without risking the legal penalty of death. The few Drylanders that do read and create texts do not actually use paint and brushes, but use sharpened sticks and feathers to scribble their funny letters in dyes called ink.

Drylanders call this process writing. We will not train you to paint in common — this skill would not benefit you. The common language is rarely painted at all — or written, as they would say, since templars and nobles usually write in their own ancient city or house scripts.

Like the dwarven script that I use to paint the common words on this card, most Drylander scripts languages use sound-characters called Letters. Tyrian and Balican, and most of Raamin family scripts also employ dwarven letters. (Tyrian and Balican nobles of course claim this script-system as their own, calling it the alphabet). Drylander elves have lost knowledge of the ancient elven characters that remain engraved in the old monuments surrounding Kurn; when they write they tend to use dwarven letters. Nibenay and Urik have unique systems of Letters, and the two oldest Raamin noble houses adapt the Nibenese script for their own house dialects. Draj uses a word-glyph system, but none of their symbols resemble the Kurnan and Eldaarish glyphs.

The Urikite letters are fastest for the scribe — if the scribe does not mind having to write exclusively in soft clay with a wedged stick. The Nibenese letters and Drajan word-glyphs, like our own, are a labor of art — elaborate, time-consuming, and impractical for adapting for new languages. The dwarven letters seem the logical choice to write common, in the rare cases when this is desired. Such is the case with the B’slav’sek and Wanderer codices, which seem to be intended for the largest possible range of readers. Note that this is an unusual purpose, since most Drylander documents are usually intended for the smallest possible range of readers!

After reading the B’slav’sek codex, your mind is doubtlessly caught up in the image of a society that treats its slaves more cruelly than we would treat our cattle. This image is generally accurate; indeed the narrator chooses rather mild examples, given the reality of Drylander slavery. But look beyond the codex matter, to the codex language itself. Does it not seem odd that six distant and isolated cities would share a convenient language? In our own tongue, this Drylander word common translates into three unrelated terms: shared, frequently encountered, and worthy of contempt. Usually, when a Drylander uses the word common, she means all three of these meanings at once. What does this mean?

First, common is shared by six cities and most of the villages and nomads in that live between; so second, the language is frequently encountered; Third, common is despised because it is shared and frequent. Most non-slaves will speak another, native language among their kin, and reserve common speech for strangers.

Many Drylander nobles do not speak common at all, or at least pretend not to.

You will soon be exposed to a second original text in the common speech: the Wanderer codex. Wanderer’s authenticity is confirmed since I debriefed its author myself when he visited Kurn, but the accuracy of Wanderer’s speculations are often in question.

Origins of the Common Speech

My predecessor theorized that common was developed by merchant houses, but the idea is absurd. The oldest merchant houses have their own languages; and the theory is belied by the richness and flexibility of common speech.
Most importantly, the dune traders make it a matter of pride to master the languages of the people that they encounter -- it would be utterly against the character and interests of the merchant houses to create and share a language that would make it easier for city-states to communicate with each other! Merchant houses make their living by serving as the bridge between isolated cultures. Breaking that isolation is the very last thing that a merchant house would want to do.

Wanderer argues that the common speech is inherent in all sentient beings because it descends from the language of halflings. Wanderer's theory does not mesh with the fact that the common speech is only common to the vicinity of the Seven cities. Furthermore, the theory ignores Wanderer's own claim that all humanoids descend from Halflings! If all peoples and cultures descend from the “Rhulisti” Halflings, then all humanoid languages are then descended from the original Rhulisti language, so the Wanderer's explanation does not really tell us anything distinctive about the Common speech.

I care less how the common speech originated, than how it spread and came to be shared by so many very different human and humanoid societies. Clearly the operating factor here is the inter-city slave trade -- huge groups of slaves traded from one city to the next. These slaves have to communicate with local templars and overseers, and also with other slaves who come from various city-states. This situation requires a shared language -- if the common speech had not existed previously, then a language would have developed to fill this need!

The Common speech is rarely spoken in Gulg, for a simple reason: by decree of the Oba. The Byašek codex describes the exceptional mistreatment of non-Gulg slaves in Gulg. Slaves sold to Gulg from other cities are given a new, Gulg name, and are severely punished for speaking any other language. This Gulg-only policy has made Gulg the most isolated of the seven cities, and the city where outsiders feel the least comfortable. Master spies often refer to the Six Cities, meaning the seven minus Gulg, which is exceptional in many ways. In contrast to Gulg, Raam is the city most open to the common tongue; only a few Raamin nobles speak other tongues, and these tongues are not called Raamin, but specific to a noble family. In other cities, nobles and artisans (both slave and free) speak the language associated with the city: Tyrian, Balkan, Unkite, Draji, Gulg, or Nibenese. Most Drylander nobles and artisans speak common as well, depending on whether or not it is convenient to speak to a given stranger. Your mastery over multiple languages will influence where we can place you.

Breeding Anarchy

To avoid the bitter danger of slave revolts, nobles and templars tend to sell off the most rebellious slaves before trouble starts. Slave traders always make sure to separate families and friends as soon as possible, in order to isolate and conquer every spark of sentiment. There are slaves living who have worked in six cities at one time or another. I do not say all seven, since the Oba (who technically owns all slaves in Gulg), tends to kill troublemaking outsiders, and sells only native trouble makers to other cities (a fate the native slaves regard worse than death). In the short term, these practices quell rebellion. The isolated slaves are stripped of influence over others, and denied the security that one needs to assert one's rights. Yet I will show you that over time, the unplanned effects of this slave trade have set the stage for bloody revolts and anarchy.

Wanderer's theory does not mesh with the fact that the common speech is only common to the vicinity of the Seven cities. Furthermore, the theory ignores Wanderer's own claim that all humanoids descend from Halflings! If all peoples and cultures descend from the “Rhulisti” Halflings, then all humanoid languages are then descended from the original Rhulisti language, so the Wanderer's explanation does not really tell us anything distinctive about the Common speech.

I care less how the common speech originated, than how it spread and came to be shared by so many very different human and humanoid societies. Clearly the operating factor here is the inter-city slave trade -- huge groups of slaves traded from one city to the next. These slaves have to communicate with local templars and overseers, and also with other slaves who come from various city-states. This situation requires a shared language -- if the common speech had not existed previously, then a language would have developed to fill this need!

The Common speech is rarely spoken in Gulg, for a simple reason: by decree of the Oba. The Byašek codex describes the exceptional mistreatment of non-Gulg slaves in Gulg. Slaves sold to Gulg from other cities are given a new, Gulg name, and are severely punished for speaking any other language. This Gulg-only policy has made Gulg the most isolated of the seven cities, and the city where outsiders feel the least comfortable. Master spies often refer to the Six Cities, meaning the seven minus Gulg, which is exceptional in many ways. In contrast to Gulg, Raam is the city most open to the common tongue; only a few Raamin nobles speak other tongues, and these tongues are not called Raamin, but specific to a noble family. In other cities, nobles and artisans (both slave and free) speak the language associated with the city: Tyrian, Balkan, Unkite, Draji, Gulg, or Nibenese. Most Drylander nobles and artisans speak common as well, depending on whether or not it is convenient to speak to a given stranger. Your mastery over multiple languages will influence where we can place you.
enslaved without cause; the wells of the city

A storm; freeborn artisans and foreigners were their labor pool. Slave traders slid into Tyr like more and more desperate means to increase templars were executed for falling behind in pool them in a single, long-term project. As was to seize all of the slaves of the nobles, and their unity and brotherhood falls apart like

... read B’slav’sek’s descriptions of the Drylander harshly as they were ever oppressed. As you glass, and they begin to oppress each other as their common enemy is vanquished, they possess none of the skills to rebuild.

... slaves make a powerful destructive force, but they possess none of the skills to rebuild. Once their common enemy is vanquished, their unity and brotherhood falls apart like glass, and they begin to oppress each other as harshly as they were ever oppressed. As you read B’slav’sek’s descriptions of the Drylander slave tribes, observe the simple repeated pattern: oppression, hope, struggle, freedom, brotherhood, anarchy, return to oppression.

Recently, the slave revolt chaos has spread even to the cities, beginning with Tyr. Kalak’s folly was to seize all of the slaves of the nobles, and pool them in a single, long-term project. As temples were executed for falling behind in their deadlines, their successors resorted to more and more desperate means to increase their labor pool. Slave traders slid into Tyr like a storm; freeborn artisans and foreigners were enslaved without cause; the wells of the city... run dry quenching the thirst of slaves — and still the labor pool was too small for Kalak’s ziggurat. Mercenaries and soldiers were employed to capture free villages and slave tribes from the neighboring desert. Treasury funds evaporated. Temples, mercenaries, and soldiers were strained to the limits just containing slave revolts! Distribution of food and water became unwieldy. Settling disputes among the slaves was out of the question; the overseers were few and terrified. As Drylanders often do, templars cloaked their own terror in cruelty. To fill the void, gangs and leaders formed among the slaves, for distributing resources and space, and for resolving quarrels. When Kalak was slain, and the templars suddenly lost their spells, there was simply no possibility of sending the slaves back to their masters! Revolted slave bands had already seized whole portions of the city, and the decimated and quarreling templars, nobles, and guards were in no position to face a united mass that outnumbered them twenty to one. If Tythian had not freed the slaves in that moment, that day, the golden walls of Tyr might have dissolved in blood.

While power seems to have shifted permanently into the hands of Tyrian ex-slaves, they have failed to use it to raise themselves from poverty or desperation. The few Tyrian successes can be attributed to the unique situation in Tyr where freeborn artisans were enslaved in mass, bringing a degree of consciousness and discipline to the raging slave-born mob.

Unbound to city, law, or language, slaves identify more closely with a slave from another city, than a noble would identify with a fellow noble from the same city. Slaves tend to expect the same treatment that another slave receives. If one slave eats, other slaves salivate. If one slave gets flogged, others wince or falter at every stroke of the lash. If one slave escapes to the desert, others, still in chains, either dream of freedom, or sit up contemplating the miseries of dying in the wastes. Every slave in the six cities knows another slave who at one time was in Tyr; and it follows, to the mind of a slave, that what happens in Tyr, could happen in Balic. Many interpreted the unexplained failing of the Messenger comet as a long-awaited sign to the sky-watching, superstitious Drylanders. Since the recent deaths of local monarchs, the entire region is on the verge of erupting in bloody slave revolts.

Wisdom of the Drylanders v2

ran dry quenching the thirst of slaves — and still the labor pool was too small for Kalak’s ziggurat. Mercenaries and soldiers were employed to capture free villages and slave tribes from the neighboring desert. Treasury funds evaporated. Temples, mercenaries, and soldiers were strained to the limits just containing slave revolts! Distribution of food and water became unwieldy. Settling disputes among the slaves was out of the question; the overseers were few and terrified. As Drylanders often do, templars cloaked their own terror in cruelty. To fill the void, gangs and leaders formed among the slaves, for distributing resources and space, and for resolving quarrels. When Kalak was slain, and the templars suddenly lost their spells, there was simply no possibility of sending the slaves back to their masters! Revolted slave bands had already seized whole portions of the city, and the decimated and quarreling templars, nobles, and guards were in no position to face a united mass that outnumbered them twenty to one. If Tythian had not freed the slaves in that moment, that day, the golden walls of Tyr might have dissolved in blood.

While power seems to have shifted permanently into the hands of Tyrian ex-slaves, they have failed to use it to raise themselves from poverty or desperation. The few Tyrian successes can be attributed to the unique situation in Tyr where freeborn artisans were enslaved in mass, bringing a degree of consciousness and discipline to the raging slave-born mob.

Unbound to city, law, or language, slaves identify more closely with a slave from another city, than a noble would identify with a fellow noble from the same city. Slaves tend to expect the same treatment that another slave receives. If one slave eats, other slaves salivate. If one slave gets flogged, others wince or falter at every stroke of the lash. If one slave escapes to the desert, others, still in chains, either dream of freedom, or sit up contemplating the miseries of dying in the wastes. Every slave in the six cities knows another slave who at one time was in Tyr; and it follows, to the mind of a slave, that what happens in Tyr, could happen in Balic. Many interpreted the unexplained failing of the Messenger comet as a long-awaited sign to the sky-watching, superstitious Drylanders. Since the recent deaths of local monarchs, the entire region is on the verge of erupting in bloody slave revolts.

Common Insults and Praises

Some of the first targets of angry slaves seem to be the most harmless of wizards. The slaves blame magic for their misery, and do not fear the quiet independent preservers as they fear the agents of the nobles and the kings. The popular sayings among the slaves are filled with contempt towards the arts of magic and even...
of reading, and these sayings have spread to the Freemen and even to the Freeborn:

Weak-eyed is a reference to reading, since mages and others who read secretly use candles at night, ruining their eyes. Stained fingers is a reference to writing. Remember that Drylanders do not paint, but write, that is, they scribble with a sharpened stick or feather-tip (a pen), in dyes which Drylanders call ink. Drylander templars often use stained fingers to accuse someone of writing or wizardry — both punishable by death. Weak-eyed and fingerstain are not only insults, but epithets that if taken seriously, could result in your being executed by the templars, or lynched by a rabble. If you are called a weak-eyed firefly, or fingerstain, be willing to fight for your good name, or die for your bad name.

Better humored, but still a provocation to fight, are these gladiator's taunts, which use literacy as signs of laughable, pitiful weakness:

When comparing scars: that's not a wound; that's a paper cut!

To an opponent that scratches you in combat:

To an opponent that scratches you in combat: that's a paper cut!

When comparing scars: that's not a wound; that's a paper cut!

To intimidate an opponent with a bigger spear than yours: that big pen of yours just signed your death warrant.

Distance yourself from anyone who uses reading-insults against templars! Always ready to brutally protect their battered dignity, templars are especially sensitive to reading insults, since their reading sets them apart as despised.

Slaves are even harsher with other slaves who take on qualities that remind them of templars. As the Bšlavšček codex shows, ex-slaves cannot abide the peace-time leaders, counselors, or would-be teachers or lawmakers. Slaves and ex-slaves despise words, which remind them of their reading-insults against templars! Always ready to brutally protect their battered dignity, templars are especially sensitive to reading insults, since their reading sets them apart as despised.

Slaves are even harsher with other slaves who take on qualities that remind them of templars. As the Bšlavšček codex shows, ex-slaves cannot abide the peace-time leaders, counselors, or would-be teachers or lawmakers. Slaves and ex-slaves despise words, which remind them of their reading-insults against templars! Always ready to brutally protect their battered dignity, templars are especially sensitive to reading insults, since their reading sets them apart as despised.

Slaves are even harsher with other slaves who take on qualities that remind them of templars. As the Bšlavšček codex shows, ex-slaves cannot abide the peace-time leaders, counselors, or would-be teachers or lawmakers. Slaves and ex-slaves despise words, which remind them of their reading-insults against templars! Always ready to brutally protect their battered dignity, templars are especially sensitive to reading insults, since their reading sets them apart as despised.

Slaves are even harsher with other slaves who take on qualities that remind them of templars. As the Bšlavšček codex shows, ex-slaves cannot abide the peace-time leaders, counselors, or would-be teachers or lawmakers. Slaves and ex-slaves despise words, which remind them of their reading-insults against templars! Always ready to brutally protect their battered dignity, templars are especially sensitive to reading insults, since their reading sets them apart as despised.

Slaves are even harsher with other slaves who take on qualities that remind them of templars. As the Bšlavšček codex shows, ex-slaves cannot abide the peace-time leaders, counselors, or would-be teachers or lawmakers. Slaves and ex-slaves despise words, which remind them of their reading-insults against templars! Always ready to brutally protect their battered dignity, templars are especially sensitive to reading insults, since their reading sets them apart as despised.

Slaves are even harsher with other slaves who take on qualities that remind them of templars. As the Bšlavšček codex shows, ex-slaves cannot abide the peace-time leaders, counselors, or would-be teachers or lawmakers. Slaves and ex-slaves despise words, which remind them of their reading-insults against templars! Always ready to brutally protect their battered dignity, templars are especially sensitive to reading insults, since their reading sets them apart as despised.

Slaves are even harsher with other slaves who take on qualities that remind them of templars. As the Bšlavšček codex shows, ex-slaves cannot abide the peace-time leaders, counselors, or would-be teachers or lawmakers. Slaves and ex-slaves despise words, which remind them of their reading-insults against templars! Always ready to brutally protect their battered dignity, templars are especially sensitive to reading insults, since their reading sets them apart as despised.

Slaves are even harsher with other slaves who take on qualities that remind them of templars. As the Bšlavšček codex shows, ex-slaves cannot abide the peace-time leaders, counselors, or would-be teachers or lawmakers. Slaves and ex-slaves despise words, which remind them of their reading-insults against templars! Always ready to brutally protect their battered dignity, templars are especially sensitive to reading insults, since their reading sets them apart as despised.

Slaves are even harsher with other slaves who take on qualities that remind them of templars. As the Bšlavšček codex shows, ex-slaves cannot abide the peace-time leaders, counselors, or would-be teachers or lawmakers. Slaves and ex-slaves despise words, which remind them of their reading-insults against templars! Always ready to brutally protect their battered dignity, templars are especially sensitive to reading insults, since their reading sets them apart as despised.

Common Knowledge and the Seven Cities

As one would expect, the names and slang expressions of most Drylander languages eventually make their way into common speech, as do needed crafts and concepts. Other tongues have their slight advantages. But with few exceptions, common offers the fullest vocabulary for any given task. The exceptions are remote: Vordon’s merchant’s script seems the best for maintaining records, Drajan for discussing star-study and navigation, the Forest Ridge halfling dialect for herbology and medicine, Urlikite for large-scale military strategy, and arguably Kreen for physical maneuvering in battle. For all other tasks, those who know common tend to switch into it, or to borrow its words, in order to describe a given task. You will notice that your sister-teachers often do the same thing from our own Kurnan Speech into Common — there is often no clearer means of expressing actions and directions.

Even when it comes to these topics where other languages excel, common competes by absorbing new and needed words. For example, the common word tak-tik obviously derive from Kreen terms such as tak-lik or chak-tik, which relate to the hunter’s mental edge over the prey. The simple structure of the slave language fosters adaptation and innovation. Ironically, the language of the lowest adapts to encompass the riches of Drylander wisdom.

Even more ironically, slaves are the source of most common knowledge in the dry lands. Elves, traders, and slaves are the only regular inter-city travelers. Drylander elves are notoriously un-trusted; the Traders are closed-
Wisdom of the Drylanders v2

http://athas.org/
lipped and deceptive about their travels, since regarding knowledge of different places and cultures is their only commodity. Thus, most of the common knowledge that the seven cities have of each other, comes from the slaves exchange.

Wise to this, templars frequently purchase slaves fresh from other cities, interrogate them about news from their previous city, and resell them to the local nobles. I attribute part of Gulg’s survival, in the face of much larger city-states, to the fact that they take many slaves in, but sell only rebellious Gulg to other cities. Thus Gulg’s defense deficiencies remain unknown. The elements help the unfortunate templars who try to interrogate native Gulg for knowledge of that city’s defenses! Gulg is a poor language for conveying numbers, and this facet remains undeveloped since they have no land-owning nobles, and all accounting is done by Gulg templars.

Although everyone else in the city must speak the Gulg tongue. Our double Templar in Gulg, reports that the templars there templars secretly use common speech for administration, numbers, and accounting, using dwarven letters.

A Word About Purpose

I must reiterate: no skill is as critical to your mission as the common speech. If you are swift with tongues, you have already inferred the master card that the word mastery derives from the artistian’s mystery. You may notice that your eldest sisters all bear the title of master Spy. You should now understand what this title means. Your elder sisters use many such words with you, sometimes to train you in common speech, and sometimes since these words simply fit better than any of our own. When you return from the dry lands, you will share many such words with your sister spies, and find yourselves unable to fully express yourselves with your fellow Kurnans.

The words and ideas of the Drylanders can become intoxicating. In spite of their madness, the Drylanders have wisdom for us to exploit, otherwise we would not bother to spy them out. In the last three ages, most of the rapid improvements in our communications, defenses, agriculture, medicine and trade derive from the Drylander wisdom gathered by your sister spies. Our profit from the wisdom of the Drylanders is no shame to Kurn — there are more Drylanders than Kurnans, so it follows that the Drylanders develop a greater number of striking ideas. After learning a little knowledge, many junior spies arrive at what they think is a tremendous realization. Let me save you the embarrassment of blurring yours out in a report to Oronis:

Any fool can see that the dry lands are in a state of transition. Seventeen Ages of dull steady slumber have suddenly given way to violent and unpredictable convulsion. But let us not mistake threat for opportunity.

Certainly the butcher-kings of the south were needlessly oppressive, wasteful, and cruel. Certainly their templars are corrupt, harsh, and in every way despicable. Certainly our natural sympathies are drawn to the heroes that oppose these kings: preserving wizards who defy prejudice and ignorance, slaves with the honey of freedom on their tongues, orphans with a hope of a better world. We would not be Kurnans if we did not sympathize. But let us not risk ourselves or our missions for the sake of sympathy. Do not involve yourselves in Drylander politics. You will find that there are worse things than to be subject to tyranny (a curious new common word that compares all bad rulers to the late king of Tyr). Anarchy is worse than tyranny — ask any RaaMIN, these days. Our well-intentioned meddling would worsen the matter.

As Kurnans, we must remember where our duties lie. Spying for Kurn means that we must pass up worthy Drylander causes. If you cannot single-mindedly embrace your Kurnan duty, then you do not have the heart to spy. If pity and sympathy move you to help the Drylanders, rather than to protect your own land, now is the time to resign your commission. As your training progresses, you will know too much for your sisters to let you leave Kurnan lands, except as a loyal, single-minded spy.

As a spy, it is unavoidable that you should begin to see the world as a Drylander sees it. This is why no missions last over five years, and why so few spies return to become senior, veteran, and master spies. Do not trust the sympathies that you accumulate in your role. You are forbidden, unless specifically directed otherwise, to associate yourselves with Veiled Alliances, or other secretive organizations. The reasons for this prohibition:

First, our agents in these organizations have plumbed the depths of Alliance secrets, and found that Veil mystique shrouds more ignorance than wisdom.

Second, such an affiliation puts an agent in unnecessary jeopardy, as the Veil assigns much more deadly tasks than we ever do, and their ranks are often penetrated by the local templars.

Third, our sad experience shows that involvement in such organizations compromises a spy’s commitment and discretion. Working so closely, you come to depend on your fellow conspirators, and to trust them more than is ever appropriate. However we might train you, Kurnans are only capable of so much guile, and deceiving your fellow conspirators is more than you should expect of yourselves.
Fourth, your revealing your origins to trusted Drylanders would burden one of your sisters with the heavy task of silencing you and your too-beloved and too-knowledgeable companions. Do not impose this hateful duty upon your sisters. I have had this cruel assignment myself. Believe me, silence duty destroys your sister’s soul, turns a bright-eyed sister into an embittered old bitch like myself.

Do not harshly judge your elder sisters for this policy. The relative safety of your missions is due to our vigilance.

Wisdom of the Drylanders v2
The prohibition against infiltrating Drylander Templarates comes for a much simpler reason. The alienation and unending suspicion among the Drylander templars would ideally suit one of our agents, if it were not for the detail of the medallion connects the templar’s mind to the Sorceror-King . . .

A word before we finish: calm your mind. The wisdom in my card may have angered you. Be still and remember the purpose of your training: to pass as a Drylander and live.

-Spymaster Mereth
Dwarven Wisdom

Dwarven and Kun

Of all the drylanders, the dwarves seem like the easiest to understand, because they are little different from the Dwarves who live among us in the Kurnan lands. As we all know, dwarves are a closed and guarded people. To call them workers would be a laughable understatement; they are a driven people. From our cradles we have heard tales of the banshees, and of the dwarven focus; from a distance we admire dwarven dedication to a purpose, but our admiration of dwarven seriousness is mingled with pity and even fear. Most of us have enjoyed the camaraderie of a dwarven co-worker or fellow-at-arms, but few of us have been into their homes, or know the particulars of their personal lives. Dwarves manage the kip-herds, and much of the leather and fine stone work in Kurn; and if we take trouble to greet them in our shops and streets, we take more trouble to leave them alone. There is much that we do not know about a people that has lived side-by-side with us for nineteen Ages.

Unlike the elves and aaracokra who judge their identity by their tribes, and the humans that judge it by their city, Dwarves tend to consider themselves dwarven above all. Many dwarves in the Drylands feign allegiance to a lord or king or city, but among their own kind they hold these allegiances lightly. Kurnan Dwarves will frequently remind us, as a token of good will, that nineteen King’s ages ago, our King and city (whose ancient and obsolete names the Dwarves insist on remembering) was the first human city-state to welcome the Dwarves. While other cities welcome dwarves to entrapment and enslavement, Dwarves are free in Kurn to live according to their traditions. Yet for all their gratitude, they consider themselves not Kurnans but Dwarves.

Dwarves do not forget, they tell us. Kurnans tend to respond that when it comes to day-to-day matters, dwarves do not have any better memories than we do. One might even call them absent-minded about certain details. Their Kurnan friends are inclined to tell them about certain details. Their Kurnan friends are inclined to tell them that the future is bound up in the past. Since today’s dwarf-child will live to see your great grandchildren grow old, dwarves do tend to live with one foot in the past. Their leaders bone this trait into ritual, porous over the writings, stories, and opinions of their ancestors. Dwarves remember a favor rendered, even when those that rendered the favor have passed into the Grey. Most importantly, they do not forget who they are.

Dwarven Writings

In Kurn, all dwarves are literate in the Kurnan language as well as in their own curious script. Dwarven lore is painted in single-color onto long strips of linen cloth, which is bound in rolls which dwarves call scrolls. Even in the drylands, where reading is forbidden by death, the leaders of the dwarven communities continue their tedious study of history. To add to the jeopardy, dwarven ancestral writings may never be burnt or discarded! Hence many dwarves become masters of hiding places, locks and traps. Never discuss this knowledge of the dwarven writing with dwarves; non-dwarves are not supposed to know about such things.

Although the written characters are identical to those used in Tyr, Balic, Raam, and Gulg, (the dwarves say that these cities stole writing from them), dwarves keep their documents secret from the eyes of all non-dwarves. Dwarven elders, known as the urhomous, meet (periodically and secretly) with friends and relatives to argue out and interpret the writings of the dead, and to reconcile contradictory stories. Dwarven communities are ruled by their elders, and the elders consider themselves ruled by their oroscrit — their word for those ancient writings that they consider to have canonical or privileged status. That the canonized oroscrit themselves do not agree with each other in significant points does not seem to dampen the enthusiasm of the elders, who frequently put a great deal of effort to reconcile contradictory rules or histories in the oroscrit. To be fair, dwarven scrolls contain more than tedious histories; some include practical applications of the Way. Dwarven focus gives many an advantage in the Way, and many of us have come to believe that their written tradition is an important part of their focus, and also enhances their powers of the Way.

My theory is not without detractors. Our own Prodigy (no doubt influenced by her friends of the Raamin Tarandan academy) suggests the opposing theory that writing weakens the mind and dulls memory and the psionic senses. With due respect to Oronis’ talented consort, Tarandan opinion is merely one tradition of the Way, albeit the most known and respected tradition. Like all traditions, Tarandan psionics has strengths and weaknesses. Dwarven writings on psionics suggest that unburdening one’s mind onto paper frees the mind for other pursuits, such as the Way.

Other than these instructions in the Way, and a few community by-laws, dwarves do not use their documents for anything particularly useful. Most of their writing is full of histories, unforgotten grudges, and the Prophecies, that
is, expectations of their ancestors. Yet discovered dwarven writings prove useful to our understanding of their culture, and help us understand dwarves better as we fulfill our roles as neighbors, templars, or spies.

Dwarven Types

Dwarven philosophical writings describe four types of dwarves, and these classifications have helped our spies to work with dwarves subtly and effectively: proud, compromised, corrupt, and broken.

The Proud

Roughly half of the dwarves of the dry lands keep all of the traditions, and limit their contact with humans. Their lives focus on an exclusively dwarven community such as Hasken or Kled. Less rigorously proud communities will deal or bargain with humans and other non-dwarves on a regular basis; North and South Ledopoldus serve as examples here. Proud dwarven communities have even been known to accept a human leader who has proven himself, as the Kurnan Dwarves give homage to Oronis, as the ash-dwarves of Charvass give homage to the human merchant Trenbull, and as one community of Tyrian dwarves follows a Tyrian human named Granj.

(As we will discuss in class, Granj’s Ward is an unusual case of a proud dwarven community interacting closely with a human community; this is an unusual case because the humans in Granj’s Ward are isolated and alienated from the rest of the City State of Tyr, which in turn has been isolated and alienated from the rest of Athas. Furthermore Granj and lately, the Tyrian government have actively promoted general literacy. Within this unique climate humans and dwarves seem to have melded into a common community — but we will see with study and time whether reality reflects this appearance. In any event, there is no intermarriage, and furthermore it is clearly the humans of Granj’s Ward that have adapted to dwarven ways, not the other way around!)

Even the proudest of the proud have been known to deal with humans on a limited basis: Hasken’s well was recently re-dug with the help of some drylander scouts working for House M’ke, and Kled has had some very friendly interactions with human drylanders, but I cannot share this information with you at this time.

To the Dwarves, Proud simply means unadapted. The proud never reveal their focus to humans, no matter how close a friend that human might be. They accept human sovereignty, but they will also have their own leaders from among the urhomous. Their focus never serves outside the community. To use one’s focus to serve a human . . . that would be compromise.

The Compromised

Nearly half of the dwarves in the dry lands keep all of the dwarven traditions, inasmuch as they can remember them and can practice them in safety. They elect an urhomous, if they are allowed to; they live with other dwarves, if they are allowed to; they keep and read the oroscri, if the templars are not watching; they teach their children the dwarven tongue, if the nobles that own them do not snatch the child from their laps and sell it to the slave-masters. In short, their focus adapts to survival, and those that can determine the compromised dwarf’s survival, may find themselves served with a dwarven focus.

Yet even the most compromised of the compromised are still stubborn and delightfully dwarven in every way, and a compromised dwarf will usually seek to regain her pride as soon as practical.

The Corrupt

These are the dwarves who have gone beyond compromise into acceptance of corruption and servitude. They will lie about their focus, cheat other dwarves out of goods and freedom, and even serve willingly as Mulfathers (a deadly dwarven insult which you will understand better when you have learned fully about drylands slavery). Corrupt dwarves are always individualistic; they care nothing for a dwarven community, and their community cares nothing for them. The focus of a corrupt dwarf is invariably greedy, whimsical, or vengeful; frequently it is an issue of a selfish or destructive focus that caused them to be expelled from their community. They hate the sight of their own kind, except for other corrupt dwarves. These they still will not trust; indeed they trust no one.

The Broken

Broken Dwarves are those who without malice or terrible wrongdoing have become unmanageable by the standards of the dwarven community. You have heard tell of the dwarf who set out alone with a wheelbarrow to level the ringing mountains, and you have heard the idle elven ballad of the dwarf afflicted with the malady known as the tribe of one.

But not all broken ones are insane; some are focused on a lonely, ludicrous, and impossible goals (such as wiping out all clans of the Silt Stalker tribe); others compulsively drink until their focus becomes addled, still others have broken faith with their focus — the dwarves call these living banshees, speak of them in whispers, pity and fear them, and generously pay them to leave the community.

Dwarven Focus

This issue of dwarven focus is greatly misunderstood, and dwarves have no interest in explaining it more precisely to humans. As
Vows are taken very seriously, and communities may exile dwarves who have vowed carelessly, e.g. sworn an oath on their parent’s heads, etc. A frequent theme in dwarfen folk tales is the drunken vow; the vow made in drunkenness, and regretted and fulfilled in soberness.

Another interesting tale about vows is the mythical story of how dwarves became hairless: a great dwarven king Vowed to kill some villain known as the dwarf-butcher long ago, and apparently failed. Somehow the failure of this Vow demanded the penalty that all dwarves everywhere remove their hair.

Dwarven Society

The image of a hairy dwarf is amusing, since dwarves have come to hate hair and compulsively pick at the few hairs that do grow from their noses, ears, and eyelashes. According to some of doroscrit, some dwarves are not naturally bald at all, but are ritually buried as children in a mixture of lye and special ashes that prevent hair growth. To help the children survive this ordeal, they are made to breathe though a tube, and their eyes, ears, and nose are sealed with wax — hence these are the only areas on a dwarf that produce hair.

This balding ceremony is the ritual that marks the passage of a young dwarf from infancy into childhood. The dwarven infant, hairy and naked, is ignored by all but his parents, until he learns to speak and demands that others pay attention to him. Then the community elders submerge the infant in the lye mixture as described above, and he is considered a child after this ritual. We must remember that dwarves age differently than we do: a dwarven adult is frequently over six years old, and dwarves are often in their forties before they are considered adults.

Dwarven children are allowed to play as they please, but when they start to pay ask questions of the elders, they are taught about the focus. To become adults, the dwarf must complete a significant focus that satisfies the community elders: repair a wall around the community, etc.

Generally, the rite of passage of childhood to adulthood is marked by introducing the new adult to strong drink. Strong fermented beverages are not considered appropriate for dwarven children, since drunkenness inhibits the focus. (This guarded dwarven secret is the reason that no dwarf will willingly drink with a non-dwarf.) It may interest you to learn that Kurnan dwarves are horrified and disgusted at our method of calming children with strong drink mixed with milk. No wonder they never learn to focus, I have heard dwarves mutter to each other!

During the days between one focus and another, dwarves try to meet alone with their own kind, so they may stay safely, and become roaringly drunk. Dwarven sub-communities...
often set dates for the focus of all community to be fulfilled, so that whole communities may get drunk together; these celebrations are known as days of accomplishment. These celebrations last for sleepless days and nights; they begin jolly, with flutes and dancing, but inevitably end on a mournful note, as the hung-over dwarves begin to consider what is yet to be accomplished. Dwarves refer to these moments as the dregs of the party, and a dwarf who is late in finishing his focus before the days of accomplishment is often warned to hurry lest she arrive on the dregs of a good party.

Days of accomplishment are determined season-to-season by the elders, according to the needs and goals of the community. They are not fixed calendar days, otherwise enemies of the dwarves would have destroyed the dwarven race years ago.

The Elders of a dwarven community do not drink, for they are maintenance-focused on the well-being of the community; they have no aims or specific purposes to accomplish, and someone must stand guard during the days of accomplishment.

Spies and Dwarves

The Dwarves are a strange and noble people, and while their minds may be rooted in a decaying past, their fruits are the fruits of wisdom and discipline. Unfortunately, they are rarely inclined to share their wisdom or skills with humans. We do not choose dwarven spies, for it would deeply offend the dwarven community to learn just how much we know about them. So much arcane dwarven wisdom (such as metallurgy, masonry and leatherwork) remain unknown to us. For the time being, this is acceptable to Oronis, since Kurnan dwarves labor with their hidden wisdom on behalf of Kurn.

But it may be that some of these wisdoms will be revealed in ancient scrolls. Should you happen on a dwarven ruin, break up the floors beneath their old meeting-places. If you find sealed vessels, do not open them; bring them to Kurn at once. The fragile scrolls within may contain wisdom of the old times that even the living dwarves do not remember.

To gain the trust of the living dwarves, feign indifference to all that is different about their culture. They guard their cultural secrets, and curiosity frightens them. Talk about their accomplishments, not their focus. Give Dwarves the illusion of privacy, and you may find their wisdom left carelessly unguarded.

Close your mouth and open your eyes, and may surprise never find you.

-Spymaster Klianis
You know the elves; you see them every day. Our elves that have been raised in Kurn are our greatest storytellers and poets. The infrequent nomadic elves that visit Kurn alternately frighten, amuse, and delight us. It seems that elven blood has an infinite capacity for emotion and the depth to share that emotion with others. All the greatest poetry in Kurn has been composed by elves. It seems that the elf can achieve a passion that we humans can only brush against. Where we humans carry our emotions like a torch, the elven heart burns like a bonfire. Remember that elves easily shed the soft cocoon of civilization, and you must see into the elven soul to understand how the tunes that you love in Kurnan elves can play out differently among the elves of the dry lands.

The Now

Makom Kuu, Ezemakom Bato. ( My Now is swift; yours is slow and sad. )

The elven heart is as erratic as it is bright. Like a falling star, the elven Heart can go out as if the light was never even there. One moment an elf can be enraptured in the romance of a new love, only to regard the relationship as old within a week. The elves of the dry lands are no different. They live in the eternal now. The elven Heart keeps them so rooted in the present, the lingering emotions of the past that humans are the victims of are unknowable to elves. They are a passionate, forgetful people, and that is their weakness. As long as what they are doing is fun and interesting they will continue. If it turns boring or routine, elves move on to something else.

Elves are prone to ecstatic states—whether in dance, in song or in the Run. Elves will become consumed by an altered state of mind that seems to control their actions. It is as if their emotions eclipse their rational minds. They will allow themselves to dance until collapse, run for hours on end, sing praises to the elements all day. If any race is prone to shamanism, it is the elves.

Imagine being in the heart of an elf, whether Drylander or Kurn. Noble, terrible, loving, hating. All the passions that you are prone to—multiplied a hundred-fold... Only to have that emotion blow away like sand, leaving a vacuum for another inferno to fill you. How focused you would be on who you are. You would be unable to tolerate frustration. You would be unable to perform tasks you did not love. You would be incapable of resisting temptation.

While we envy the elves for their gifts, we pity them for the plights that their impulsive natures throw them into. Elves, on the other hand, often speak of how horrible they would find it to be human. To an elf, the idea of bridling ones passions reeks of a lingering death! It is no wonder that the dwarven mind is so different, and the elven one see so little in common. Whereas the dwarf is steeped in history and is focused on the future, the elf is so forced in the present moment, that thoughts of the past and the future become indistinct and unrealistic.

History

Elves share a rich oral tradition, with many myths about their origins, and twice as many myths about the successes of their tribes. But none of these stories seem to agree. For example, every tribe claims that it was founded by Coraanu, and blessed by Coraanu to be the greatest elven tribe. Coraanu is the universal father of the elven people, but the tales his exploits vary from tribe to tribe, and even from year to year! In fact, the truth of Coraanu’s exploits is immaterial, although at the time of a ritual or celebration the tales are believed totally. The true importance of the tales of Coraanu is the importance of the elven race, and their racial ability to survive on speed and wits.

Instead the elven campfire, these myths are not only recounted, but also performed, and all manner of insults towards the other races are
act out. If you have the opportunity to see these rituals in progress, you are a lucky individual, for outsiders are not taken in lightly.

Elves often speak of the one who will return. This individual will be carrying the sword of the last great elven chieftain. These myths follow that this individual will be the return of a Coraanu and the elves will once again take their rightful place in history. But like all elven stories, the exact particulars to this story vary from tribe to tribe. I think that these stories are a justification for the elven self-esteem. Seeing that their place in society is nomadic, and they are shunned by most settled civilizations, the myth of a redeemer gives a sense of hope that is vital to the survival of their society.

Elven Cultural Types

There are four types of elves; Nomadic, Settled, Healers, and Savages.

Nomadic Elves

Mupo Common? (Do you speak common?)

Nomads are tribes of elves that wander where the mood sends them. They are raiders, herders, traders. They are versatile and usually are some of the larger tribes. They can do anything to survive and usually do. Some Nomads must walk their own path to the point of forsaking their Tribe for a time. They walk their own way. They are generally pacifists, unlike the Savage elf. Nomads do not desire constant strife, they only seek for the horizon and what lay beyond. The best examples of these elves are the Swift Wings. (‘Kuualko-dai’ in their own language) They are primarily herd Kanks and only stop to trade for supplies that they cannot make themselves.

Settled Elves

Komahh E’komake! (Drink Now - Pay Later!)

The settled elves are the most like the elves we are used to here in Kurn. They have given up their wandering, and have taken permanent homes. Sometimes an entire tribe will settle, as occurred here in Kurn eight hundred years ago with the curious tribe that now calls itself the Barber’s Clave, in Kurn’s trade district. In the Tablelands, The Silver Hands and Night Runners offer two examples of settled elves:

The Silver Hands (Utramur-Dai), lead by Toramund, own a fort surrounding the Silver Spring. A traveler there will meet an affected, carnival-like atmosphere designed to relieve visitors of their pocketbooks. These elves’ only goal is money, primarily the Silver that Toramund craves. This situation is most likely temporary as the wish to settle is Toramund’s alone. With his death, the Silver Hands will very likely move on.

The Night Runners (Utokonu-Dai), have adopted the city-state of Raam as their own and work in its underground as a black market, assassins, courtesans, and entertainment. This is the only elven tribe known to embrace half-elves in to the tribe as full members. The tribe is rumored to have the throne of Raam in mind. We have no solid information on this tribe and nobody can guess as to the leader’s motives.

Some settled elves are members of slave tribes, or are currently involved with a human lover. (Human-elf relationships are usually ill-fated, but for many, they seem irresistible.)

Healers

Muest Munahl Sab, Jakkete (Let me help you, city-dweller.)

Healers are elven priests of the Elements or individuals who act with Athas in mind. Some are historians or archeologists, some are members of tribes that act in consort with Druids. The Clear Waters (Uutobo-Dai) are the only example of a whole tribe of Healing elves that I know of. The Healing elves share some sort of religious zeal for improving their current conditions. One has to wonder if a Healer as an overdeveloped sense of past and future for an Elf. This could be a result of elemental spirits interfering or influencing specific elves, or a sign the Now isn’t as strongly felt in some elves as in others. Or even stranger, that some Drylanders just have good hearts!

Savage Elves

Neek Mata, Guhdat! (Prepare to die, Human scum!)

The wilderness of the Drylands can turn the most intelligent person into an instinctual animal. Savages seem to act on instinct alone, attacking for food, killing for territory, settling disputes with violence and bravado. For these elves there is no peace, only one battle after another, one conquest after another, until the end comes for you, only to be replaced by your children. This cycle is becoming more and more common, it seems. As more and more tribes fall into hardship and survive through violence, more and more tribes are becoming Savages, such as the dreaded Jura-Dai, also known as the Silt Stalkers. The Silt Stalkers strike from ambush and destroy all they lay their hands on. More information is needed about these Savages, but the risks of spying among them are great.

Dealing With Elves in the Dry Lands

Mage Toy! (This one’s an easy mark!)

If you wish to pass unnoticed, bore them: dress blandly and speak slowly. Elves secretly believe in their superiority and regard all other races as slow and short. Dato is their word for human, which means just that, short and slow. (Half-giants they call Ad’ dato, that is, twice than human, that is, twice as short and slow).
On the other hand, if you wish to catch an
their attention, you must be flashy, highly-
skilled, or best an elf in some sort of
competition of some sort. Elves seem to
expect some sort of humility from humans
and because of their height, and derive a
measure of satisfaction from intimidating
humans with their superior height. To
overcome your innate disadvantage, and to
gain higher ground, brag with gusto whenever
you have their attention. This will invite more
challenges, although most will be verbal. Elves
like nothing more than to be entertained. If
you can return their verbally abuse skillfully
and in good humor, you will offend nobody
other than the one you are insulting.

If you wish to win their friendship then be
prepared to prove your honesty. Don’t allow
yourself to take advantage of elven
mistakes. These are deliberate ploys to measure the
character of your proffered friendship. Elves
expect that everyone not in their tribe is an
enemy, so you must be resolute in your plea for
friendship. You may be ‘tested’ for years before
being accepted into the fold. In most cases,
you will not have time to win an elf’s
friendship.

If you need their short-term cooperation,
simply offer money. Bribery and gifts are an
inherent part of elven culture and it is a rare
elf that refuses a gift. Beware giving to Savages
though. (In fact, beware Savages altogether.)
for they will assume your gift as tainted and
treat your gesture as a threat. A gift will get an
elf talking to you, but not trusting you.
However, a bribe will probably get an elf to

Wisdom of the Drylanders v2
help you as long as it is not too much trouble.
Bribes can be blatant with elves, but remember
that it will only work in the short term, or as
long as your money holds out.

Above all realize that the elves of the dry lands
are crafty, intelligent, and clever. They
improvise moment to moment and may not
give you time to adapt to them surprising you.
They will see through a ruse quicker than you
think. Tell them as few lies as possible.

Looking into the Elven Soul

Enjoy their music! It has a feral quality that the
elves of Kurn lack. Their savagery has not
affected their innate beauty. Do not take them
lightly, even if they appear to take themselves
lightly. Beneath the mirth and frivolity there is
a streak of intensity that should even make a
dwarf think twice. Listen to the intensity of
their poetry and song —

Maieuu Mumika, Mauutra Ffais, Corannugu
Maieuu Nikuko, Maita Akotota, Corannubu
Maieu Ni’kom, Masargu Fae, Corannuub

Translated —

As we run to the horizon, our silver souls ring out,
with Corannu’s song.

As we run into battle, our blades steal death, with
Corannu’s fury.

As we dance in the now, our music plays on, with
Corannu’s laughter.

—Spymaster Kalisvrai

Enjoy their music! It has a feral quality that the
eльves of Kurn lack. Their savagery has not
affected their innate beauty. Do not take them
lightly, even if they appear to take themselves
lightly. Beneath the mirth and frivolity there is
a streak of intensity that should even make a
dwarf think twice. Listen to the intensity of
their poetry and song —

Maieuu Mumika, Mauutra Ffais, Corannugu
Maieuu Nikuko, Maita Akotota, Corannubu
Maieu Ni’kom, Masargu Fae, Corannuub

Translated —

As we run to the horizon, our silver souls ring out,
with Corannu’s song.

As we run into battle, our blades steal death, with
Corannu’s fury.

As we dance in the now, our music plays on, with
Corannu’s laughter.

—Spymaster Kalisvrai
Wisdom of the Trembling Plain

Every Flamesky season, Kurn’s Trade District is overrun with the smell and sounds of herd animals from the Trembling Plains. We buy the animals for meat, bone, and leather. We call the masters of these herds “trembling herders” because they come from the trembling plains, because the herders find refuge within our walls to escape the mantis-hordes of the far west, and because they seem nervous and ill at ease within our walls. All Kurnan citizens have marched at least once with the militia, and have seen a few days travel within the Plains, at least on the trade road. Most of us have had a tour of duty on Kurn’s walls, and from that height can see the plains extending for miles beneath the Banding Slopes. It looks so empty. So we look at all the herders during Flamesky season, and ask, where do these people come from?

In the Trembling Plains, they could be anywhere. These herders are masters of blending into their environment. We laugh at their “dirty” cloaks that look as if the owner had rolled on the ground, and not bothered to dust herself off. Take a closer look at one of those “dirty” cloaks, next time you get a chance. Those twigs and pieces of dry leaves were carefully sewn to the exterior of the fabric. The motley color of the cloth was not a poor dye job, but a cunningly simulation of the Trembling Plains’ natural patterns. The herders call this the “three season cloak,” because it is only truly useful for “three seasons” out of the year — Flamesky, Coldnights, and Ral’s Rest. (We would call that time period four seasons, but the herders do not recognize the season that we call Harvestide; they have no concept of the harvest!) During the other two seasons, Windflood and Fruitbirth, the ground of the Trembling Plains is muddy and increasingly green, so the cloak is “out of season,” and does not help the wearer blend in with the land. Herders do not like to carry what they don’t use, so come Windflood season, the herders bury their three season cloaks, sealed in water-tight leather pouches which they purchase from Kurnan tanners in Fort Stench.

Economics

The plains are dotted with herder stashes, wells, and cisterns made of Azeth tile. They fill the cisterns during Windflood season, and empty them throughout the rest of the year. Although nomadic, the herders consider the wells their own property and resent strangers knowing about them. To enforce the ethic that one leaves others’ cisterns alone, some tribes leave deliberately poisoned cisterns might be placed in the ground, and use herbs to make cisterns of good water look or smell strange. The stashes contain items of use to the herders, like the three-season cloaks, but no objects of great, lest bandits torture herders or threaten their children to discover their secret stashes. A herder's wealth is in his herds, which are generally too large for bandits to carry away. As a general rule, herders will only handle silver within the walls of Kurn or Azeth’s Rest, and they will walk away from gold as if it were poison. They prefer to trade their herds directly for the goods they need, but within our walls, will accept silver as payment so long as they can trade the silver for something else. Bandits generally don’t even bother searching or torturing the herders for their wealth anymore; they simply take the few cattle they can eat or carry, which means that even after a bandit attack, the herder keeps most of his wealth.

Reasons for Fear

While shunning silver and gold does offer herders respite from the bandits, other enemies see the herders themselves as the treasure. Slave traders from the tablelands, and Red Guard raiders from South Guard make frequent incursions. There is little the herders can do other than run and hide from such enemies. Consider that our own Black Brotherhood doubles its patrol force when it moves anywhere east of the Trade Road near South Guard. The herder clans do not have a chance against the Red Guard, nor against the Crissis Nikaal tribe that mounts slaver raids between Yaramuke and Dry Spring. If they see strangers in their land, the herders presume these are slavers, and will communicate carefully with other tribes, and have hiding scouts follow the strangers’ every move. Herders tend to graze in an area for a few days, then pack their tents and move a day’s travel away. Hidden scouts up to five miles from any encampment warn the other herders if strangers are approaching, communicating this information in a simple code of insect calls. Herders watch travelers quietly until they find it convenient to approach, until they feel safe. Since some travelers have tortured herders in order to find out the location of their wells, herders who wish to meet with a group of strange travelers, cleverly time their appearances to immediately after the travelers find water, to avoid offering the traders that temptation.” Even if they never decide to meet with the travelers, they watch carefully, and listen, and they convey information to other herder tribes, and usually to House Azeth. Very few caravans or trade parties manage to travel to Azeth’s Rest before the rumors of their travels arrive.

Relations between Tribes

The relationship between herder uncannily resembles the relationship between different elven tribes. Like elves, the “Trembling
Herders’ sense a common identity with each other, and usually make a common front against outsiders (or at least pretend to), but they raid each others’ cattle, fight over wells, and sometimes go to open war with each other. They differ from elf tribes in that very few tribes last more than two generations, and intermarriage is much more frequent, consequently, very few of the herder clans have their own separate dialect. Feuds between herding clans sometimes last longer than the clans themselves. Intermarriage between tribes is at least as common as marriage within the tribe.

**Marriage**

Most herders are monogamous, except for their clan leaders. Like House Azeth, the herders are expected to only marry once in their lives, but male clan leaders act as “proxy husband” for all of the clan’s widows, and father to all of the tribe’s orphans. Intermarriage between tribes is very common. Upon a tribal patriarch’s death, many tribes disintegrate into smaller tribes, or dissolve completely, with the tribe members seeking refuge with other tribes. Sometimes these tribal breakups result in quarrels over the tribes’ assets. The tribal leaders have no authority to stop anyone from leaving the tribe, and some of the less talented tribal leaders have stepped out their tent in the morning to find that their entire tribe has abandoned them. On the other hand, some of the more persuasive leaders command fanatical loyalty.

**Information and Rumor**

Herders have great deal to say about the Tablelands, the Glowing Desert, and the Dim Lands, but little of it is likely to be accurate, and less of that is likely to be current. (One particularly out-of-date rumor that has circulated the Trembling Plains for over a thousand years: *The Dragon is coming back.* They refuse to believe that the Dragon is dead, even though neither Dragon nor sorcerer-king has passed north of Fort Ral in over a thousand years.) While there are a few in every tribe that read and write picts, these are poor people who rely on oral history. They do love stories, and when it comes to stories of distant lands, they care little whether the stories are true or fanciful. But when it comes to what the herders call “things of consequence,” such as location of water holes, animal mating habits, caravan schedules, wind and weather patterns, or the price of Kurnan leather goods during windflood season, the herders show uncanny expertise.

**Meeting Herders in Kurn**

It is easy to find herders in Kurn’s Trade District during the Flamesky season. You will not get very much information from them, since they are not on their ground, but if you offer them something they need, for some of their cattle, they will remember your face, and you’ll at least find out their name and clan. Do not forget that information. If a herder tells you that her name is Feseri of Filkun, say something like “ah yes, the Filkun clan,” especially if you’ve never heard of the Filkun Clan. The smallest clans with the least reputation are always the toughest about this issue. Never tell herders that you’ve never heard their clan name before, unless your purpose is to offend them. If a herder does not tell you a clan name, that probably means that he’s the clan patriarch. If a herder tells you that his name is Khemar, and you foolishly ask, “of what clan?” you have insulted the patriarch and the entire Khemar clan. When a patriarch dies, the name of the clan changes to the name of the new clan leader—assuming that the clan does not break into multiple clans or disintegrate entirely!

**Meeting Herders in Azeth’s Rest.**

You will be able to get more information by meeting herders in Azeth’s Rest. They are more comfortable as guests of House Azeth than among our walls, partly because Azeth makes them feel more welcomed. Although of Kel Tas ancestry like ourselves, Azeth has intermarried considerably with the herders, follows their ethic against defiling and banditry, and by coincidence, worships the winds as they do, since Azeth was founded by a priest of the winds. The herders consider Azeth to be the greatest clan of the Trembling Plains. Corik Azeth, the current leader of House Azeth, was actually born in a herding clan, and married into House Azeth.

**Placing an Agent in a Herder Clan**

While some of our agents often use marriage as a means of infiltrating an organization, I strongly recommend against this when it comes to Herders of the Trembling Plains. Herders take marriage even more seriously than most Kurnans, and they do not remarry even after a spouse dies. Many of them visit Kurn every year, and there is too much potential for mischief if a herder or a clan patriarch discovers his lost wife is a citizen in Kurn. There is a much simpler means of infiltrating a herder clan: as a slave.

**Slavery among the Clans**

Like our own Kurnan slaves, herding usually admit new members as slaves at first. This period of slavery cannot last more than seven years. After the slavery period is over, the tribe must pay the former slave for her service, or persuade her to join the tribe. When the tribe leader wants someone to join his tribe as a full member, the leader usually tries to arrange a marriage to a member of the tribe. To marry a herder, a non-tribe member must either have the blessing of the tribal leader, or persuade...
the herder to leave the tribe. Do not assume that the herders learned the seven year tradition from Kurn; my research suggests that it was the other way around. These herder traditions regarding slavery are a kinder adaptation of the Elven tradition regarding slavery, and we learned our tradition from the herders.

**Mixed Heritage**

The nomadic herders of the Trembling Plains mostly descend from Kurnans and Eldaarish people that fled their cities when their Kings began to gather sacrifices for tribute to the Dragon, but they have intermarried with other peoples, including elves. Nearly all herders know a friend or relative that married an elf. These are usually brief or seasonal marriages; when the tribe moves on, the elf, usually the male, picks up and leaves his spouse that cannot keep up, and who belongs with her own people anyway. Elves consider it remarkable fidelity if the husband to return every year for a season, to visit with his wife and child, if he can find where their herds are grazing. Even though the elf-human marriages are seldom happy and often tragic, herders treat their half-elven cousins no differently than anyone else. Although it is not immediately apparent, nearly all the herders have some elven ancestry. Perhaps the “elfish” blood has helped them to survive the life outdoors in a climate where temperatures range from blazing to freezing.

**Language**

The herders have their own dialect, which is a mishmash of Kurnan, Eldaarish, Common, and Elvish. Unlike the Kurnans and Dimlanders, most herders do speak a little “drylandish” (the common tongue). But the herder rendition of the Common tongue is even more difficult to follow than their rendition of Kurnan. Here’s a snippet of dialogue that I heard between a Drajan and a herder on the trade road just South of Fort Stench.

**http://athas.org/**

**Geting Information from Trembling Plains Herders.**

In the Trembling Plains, information is not a commodity, but as something that is shared among friends, or used to show one’s superiority to a rival. The herders love stories, and hoard information. They know a great deal about the bandit state politics, Kurn, Eldaarich, and even the tablelands. They love to tell and to hear stories about places both near and far. Their knowledge is quite extensive and detailed, but NOT necessarily accurate. Stories of Eldaarich or say Tyr would be hard to verify, so stories about these places would be wildly inaccurate. Truth be told, they don’t really care about accuracy when it comes to tales of far-off places. They think of wealth as herd animals and clothing. Offering money for information will get them to clam up, but telling them an interesting story tempts them to try to tell a story that is more interesting. Not necessarily true, but more interesting. On the other hand, if you can give them information that is helpful to them, they will try to out-do the favor, and give you information that is useful to you.

**Leadership Roles**

I have spoken of patriarchs, because there are few matriarchs in the Trembling Plains. Those women who do lead tribes are almost invariably air priestesses. The herders tend to look to men for leadership, but if the winds choose a woman, then the people will follow the winds. Patriarchs are often priests of air, but more often they are preservers, bards, or mindbenders who pretend to be priests of air. All of the herder clans in the Trembling Plains worship air, as far as I can tell, except for the Kurnan kip-herding dwarves.

The herders of the Trembling Plains give no thought at all at preserving the essential separate authority roles within the community; a herder exposed to a Kurnanclave wonders at all our positions of authority within a clave, Captain, Quartermaster, Chaplain, and Speaker, and would ask, which one is the most important? It doesn’t occur to the herders that one leader might be more important for one role, and another leader more important for another role. These poor herders even let their male patriarchs handle matters of fine diplomacy; it should come as no surprise that the winds choose a woman, then the people will follow the winds. Patriarchs are often priests of air, but more often they are preservers, bards, or mindbenders who pretend to be priests of air. All of the herder clans in the Trembling Plains worship air, as far as I can tell, except for the Kurnan kip-herding dwarves.

The herders of the Trembling Plains give no thought at all at preserving the essential separate authority roles within the community; a herder exposed to a Kurnanclave wonders at all our positions of authority within a clave, Captain, Quartermaster, Chaplain, and Speaker, and would ask, which one is the most important? It doesn’t occur to the herders that one leader might be more important for one role, and another leader more important for another role. These poor herders even let their male patriarchs handle matters of fine diplomacy; it should come as no surprise that the winds choose a woman, then the people will follow the winds. Patriarchs are often priests of air, but more often they are preservers, bards, or mindbenders who pretend to be priests of air. All of the herder clans in the Trembling Plains worship air, as far as I can tell, except for the Kurnan kip-herding dwarves.

It doesn’t occur to the herders that

**Befriending the Patriarchs**

The question is, as usual, how we turn the weaknesses of other people to our advantage. The best short term solution for creating
inroads with the herder clans is to play on the vanity and self-importance of their patriarchs. Some spymasters have wasted our school’s budget on gifts to patriarchs, noting that House Azeth gives gifts to Patriarchs. The Spymasters failed to notice the timing of Azeth’s gifts. Like Kurnans, the herders track the calendar carefully, and remember the date of a person’s birth, but for different reasons than we do. While the Nibenese track birth dates to determine a person’s fate, and we Kurnans remember them to give honor and thanks to our mothers, the Herders of the Trembling Plains turn the birth date of their patriarch or matriarch into the tribe’s greatest celebration, a time to honor their leader, by showering him with gifts and attention. While herders recognize and appreciate benefactors, it is unspeakably presumptuous to count yourself a “friend” of a patriarch, when you neglected to send him a present to honor his birth date. Huzbug Azeth, the Quartermaster at Azeth’s Rest, understands this simple and primitive tradition (and others like it), and thrives in the herders’ trust and appreciation.

Why the Trembling Plains Matters
We cannot afford to ignore the Trembling Plains. It serves as the buffer zone between Kurn and Eldaarich. It is the hunting grounds where Daskinor’s Red Guards track down those who wish to escape Eldaarich and the Dim Lands. The Trembling Plains extend from the southern edge Kurn’s verdant belt, south past Azeth’s Rest, and then curve north of the northmost edge of the Ringing Mountains, reaching almost into the hinterlands beyond. Bordering on so many lands, and offering generous grazing for herd animals and mounts, the Trembling Plains hosts conflicts between creatures and peoples that otherwise would never have met. Some of these conflicts have become seasonal events, like the savage mantis from the hinterlands follow mekillot herds up the Trembling Plains, and then attack herders, towns, and forts along the sea of silt when the game begins to run out. More importantly, the Trembling Plains offers enough grazing ground for an entire army to pass hundreds of miles from Draj or Yaramuke right to the gates of Kurn. I submit that Kurn should know about such an army before it passed South Guard. All we need is a few agents among the herder clans, and some effort by the Grey Heralds to maintain good relations with the patriarchs.

—Spymaster Anippe
Kenku Wisdom

Foreward

Unlike most of Kurn's spies, I was sent to study not some foreign people and their manners, but the engineering marvels of Ledopolus. My training was in architecture, not in social mores and styles of bread! Therefore this card will be a narrative tale of my experiences, painting facts and not fanciful pronouncements about an entire race's behavior. Others may infer, but I will not pronounce!

The Mission

As the records in the Chamber of Seekers will show, I was sent not to pursue curious birdlike creatures but to study the labors of the dwarves, as they constructed the great bridge from Ledopolus. I was in Ledopolus, observing the construction and working my way into the chief architect Wrangar's confidences, as ordered, when a tantalizing prey entered my ken.

I had just left Wrangar's chambers when the morning light revealed a dwarven patrol stomping back into North Ledopolus. As usual they were crass and smelly, but unlike normal they were not drunk. In fact, they were dragging a large bundle, which at first I thought to be a dead mul or young half-giant wrapped in rags and tarps. But the creature was neither, nor was it dead — its psionic waves of pain, skittering and crying, bespoke life. But I could not interpret the images, they were alien, with strange perspective, and shifting suddenly. The alien nature of my contact with it reminded me of the first time I made contact with a kreen in the wastes.

A thief! A thief! Tried to cheat the uhrnomus's nephew! shouted the crier following the troops and their burden. Have a care for your thoughts, it's a 'bender!

I laid a simple net, gathering the thoughts of the dwarven constables, and learned that the creature was caught trying to sell false goods to a dwarven merchant. The merchant's mindbender had detected the fraud — which means that it could not have been hard for a more skilled mindbender such as myself to detect. The merchant had summoned the city constabulary, since the event took place near the walls, and in the ensuing fracas the other thieves had escaped.

Still singing their songs of victory and conquest, the dwarves dragged their prisoner off to the Gaoler's Hole. There aren't many cells, since the gaolers tend to move their prisoners swiftly on to the waiting Grey, and the strange mindbender was the day's only guest. I retired to my chamber, and spent most of the day seeking to understand more of the strange psionic cries of the prisoner — it seemed to be trying to converge, but found none with whom to achieve the unity, and its aloneness tormented it as much as its physical injuries. After hours of attentive meditation, I could begin to understand its image-wails, and I thought I might be able to communicate with it.

I risked a report back to the spymaster, informed her that I had discovered a Drylander mindbender seeking to use the same convergence techniques that previous spies have reported before vanishing in the Dim Lands. Perhaps this prisoner was a rogue Eldaarish, but even if not, the chance to study its techniques could not be missed. I was granted permission, and moved swiftly. I knew little enough about the creature, but I knew from Wrangar that it would be executed the next day so I had to act quickly to glean any intelligence from it. I slipped past the guards — even the obsessive ones have to sleep sometime — and made my way into the Gaoler's Hole. The strange prisoner was being kept in theoubliette, the windowless hole at the base of the jail. It was still hobbled, and a rasclinn hide was knotted over its head to impair its psionics.

The thing was instantly aware of me, and it struggled to its feet as I entered the oubliette. But it was blinded, and its mind distracted by its injuries and the rasclinn hide. I had to remove the hide to invade its mind, but it was far weaker than I and none of the aid it so desperately beseeched appeared. It was easy to conquer its mind, and learn all that it knew. It was not Eldaarish; the creature was not a man. It was a bird, though bulkier and not so tall as our aaracokra allies. Even so it was taller than I was, and larger, and could have proven a challenge to a human warrior had it not been hobbled and wounded. Its brownish feathers, perhaps once glossy, were ragged and dun from confinement and abuse, and many lay scattered across the floor.

The bird-man's bright yellow eyes reflected the little light in the cell, showing a hint of gold. The stains of dried blood marked its face and chest, and its dun yellow beak was cracked at the tip. Clearly the dwarves had not exaggerated when they told me how the thief had resisted being taken. The bird-man had talons on its bare feet, like a kes'trekel, and its hands had similar but more facile claws. Its back was broad, with heavy wings folded against them not unlike a large traveler's pack. The dwarves had bound the wings, of course, with taut kip hide that had tightened cruelly as it dried — dwarven guards do not like their criminals escaping!

The bird tried to evade me, I could sense it had a terrible fear or dislike for strangers, but the
The poor thing was a young male, confused and alone. It knew only that it was in the clutches of the wingless unblessed and that it could never go home again – apparently it had been taught that outsiders were cursed, and that any contact with the unblessed tainted it as an outsider. Its name was T’trr’ack. Like others of its kind, T’trr’ack was incapable of any human words, though psionic illusions permit limited interaction with other beings. Kenku beaks allow them only simple sounds and unaspirated consonants, but I took from him the knowledge of posturing and mental speech that kenku use among themselves.

Nearby everything in T’trr’ack mind was worth memorizing. Kenku cannot smell very well, and their sense of touch is muffled by their feathers and the scaly skin on their talons. Their eyes are large, and their vision is excellent – though not as good as that of our aracokran allies, I suspect. They sense the world primarily through their large, but hidden ears, which are extraordinarily sensitive. They also seem to have a peculiar ability to sense movement or pressures around them, but try as I might I could not figure out either how they did it or how to duplicate it.

Morning light was breaking. I had probed through nearly all of the prisoner's memories, and there was little value in risking discovery. I swiftly disengaged and departed before the dwarven guards appeared. I watched the execution; they cast T’trrack, still bound, into a pool of silt, with only a giant's hair line tied around his taloned legs. The cheering dwarves watched him pitch and thrash until he was dead, then they dragged the body out and burned it. Abomination! shouted the crier as the Uhrnomus's deputy set the torch to T’trr’ack.

I tried to get Metalsucker Kass’taka to trust me, but neither he nor any of the other kenku paid me any attention. They were absolute in ignoring me, or in clawing me when I attempted to speak to them. Above all the bird-men honor their code, which calls for all strangers and those tainted by strangers was not even that hard, for someone trained by Kurn's masters. Kass’taka wasn't looking for an imposter, he was seeking to find out just how much T’trr'ack had been tainted by the unblessed.

The memories that I had created convinced him that T’trr’ack had escaped after the briefest captivity, before being taken to Ledopolus, and Kass’taka seemed to believe this ruse. But the conditioning against strangers and those tainted by strangers was strong – so I was taken to the nest of the Kk’rass’atk bound.

We traveled down the estuary, using psionics to imitate human form by day – even when no one was around, just as a precaution - and hiding in secret camps by night. All the camp-holes were carefully hidden, nestled under rocks or in the lee of small hills, far off natural lines of drift, and each had a small cache of dried meat and other supplies, itself hidden beneath stones or buried in pouches. Such meticulous planning! Not even Kurnan forays are so carefully planned! The kenku take no chances, it is no wonder they are so little known!

Wisdom of the Drylanders v2 showed them the mind of T’trrack as well, and I let them take me. There was risk, for T’trrack's mind had revealed well how little love his people had for outsiders or even for other kenku that had been soiled by contact with the unblessed. But I hoped they would take me to the bird-men's home, so I acquiesced.

The dozen or so kenku bound me, clipping my wings and guarding me closely. Metalsucker Kass’taka, the leader of the trade-band, interrogated me with the Way. I used my skills to convince him he was talking to T’trrack. It wasn’t even that hard, for someone trained by Kurn's masters. Kass’taka wasn't looking for an imposter, he was seeking to find out just how much T’trr'ack had been tainted by the unblessed.

I let them take me. There was risk, for I showed them the mind of T’trr’ack as well, and I acquiesced.

The memories that I had created convinced him that T’trr’ack had escaped after the briefest captivity, before being taken to Ledopolus, and Kass’taka seemed to believe this ruse. But the conditioning against strangers and those tainted by strangers was strong – so I was taken to the nest of the Kk’rass’atk bound.

We traveled down the estuary, using psionics to imitate human form by day – even when no one was around, just as a precaution - and hiding in secret camps by night. All the camp-holes were carefully hidden, nestled under rocks or in the lee of small hills, far off natural lines of drift, and each had a small cache of dried meat and other supplies, itself hidden beneath stones or buried in pouches. Such meticulous planning! Not even Kurnan forays are so carefully planned! The kenku take no chances, it is no wonder they are so little known!

I tried to get Metalsucker Kass’taka to trust me, but neither he nor any of the other kenku paid me any attention. They were absolute in ignoring me, or in clawing me when I attempted to speak to them. Above all the bird-men honor their code, which calls for all treating everyone not in and of the nest with suspicion.

After three days of furtive travel we reached the area of the Kk’rass’atk nest. The nest itself, I knew from T’trr’ack's memories, was a series of caverns opening in the cliff face overlooking the estuary. Metalsucker Kass’taka urged his patrol to hasten, bundling my bound body in a lizardskin as we reached the edge of the cliffs. Long shadows ran down the rugged, beetling rocks and down to the silt, invisible far below. It was nearly dark when all the trade-band's bundles were secured and they dove, in pairs, bearing bundles, over the side. Four of them hefted me, trussed and packed, as they leaped.

Kenku fly laboriously when burdened. No doubt they are far more graceful when not carrying heavy loads, but this flight all the bird-
men were struggling. Wings prevent them 
wearing packs while in flight, and the weight 
carried in their smallish arms unbalances them 
– so it was slowly, and unsteadily, that we flew 
down the canyon walls. Maintaining my 
ilusions of appearance and weight while being 
swung back and forth like a stonethrower’s 
slings is less easy than it sounds!

The sun was setting behind us as we flew. As 
we rounded a sharp outcragging, it seemed like 
a hundred flaming amber dewdrops were lining 
the cliffs before us. As we approached, I could 
see the golden disks better – they were not 
giant gems but the eyes of the kenku, glowing 
gold in the sunset as they all clung to rock 
spurs and perches and looked west down the 
Estuary. It would take me weeks to learn that 
this was their typical evening ritual – what 
significance it may have for them I could never 
determine, though it did not seem to be 
worship. Only the rulers of the nest fail to 
appear for the farewell to the sun; perhaps this 
one penalty of their bloated size.

The nest-caves were honeycombed in the 
beetling cliff of sandstone, irregular domed 
passages 10’ in diameter. Numerous chambers 
lay off the passages, for purposes of which I 
which I will paint presently. The rooms which 
overlooked the silt estuary below were shaded 
by narrow ledges and overhanging stone like 
awnings, no doubt to make the disguise of the 
place more complete.

I was roughly dragged into a large room well 
within the caves and cast down before the 
Nestlord and Priestess Consort of the 
Kk’rass’atk, two huge kenku taller than elves 
and as massively built as tareks. There were no 
preliminaries, no questions – the huge 
Nestlord immediately probed me, searching my 
mind for exactly what had happened to 
T’trr’ack in the hands of the dwarves. Hiding 
myself wasn’t hard, and the false memories I 
had created were plausible – but it was difficult 
maintaining the illusion of a bird mind.

As the Nestlord rampaged through my mind, I 
realized with sudden horror that he had more 
familiarity with T’trr’ack than one would 
expect between a tribal leader and a lowly 
journeyman (later, when I had seen more of 
the nest, I recalled the Priestess Consort’s 
bloated abdomen, and realized that all the 
kenku in the band were hatched from her eggs, 
and therefore the Nestlord’s own children). I 
took quick action to hide my own mind more 
deeply, pretending memory loss. Despite his 
suspicions about T’trr’ack’s curious memory 
losses and unverifiable tale, the Nestlord 
decided that his son T’trr’ack could live, but 
henceforth as a slave to the nest, no longer a 
member of the tribe. In token of my status I 
was given male tasks to perform. I hauled things 
through the nest, cut fungus for the females to 
distill, and waited on the tables of the Nestlord 
and Priestess Consort. Since male kenku are 
about as strong as male humans, the hauling 
was taxing work. All things considered, I could 
have been happier sitting on eggs with the 
females in the nest!

One of the more onerous duties I acquired 
was that of minding the colonies of renks that the 
Kk’rass’atk kept in their deeper caves. The 
bird-men cast their droppings, and the offal 
from their meals, into pits in the deepest of the 
nest’s caves, where these leavings are fed to 
colonies of nauseous renks. The renks of the 
Kk’rass’atk grew to more than four feet long, 
glistening slimy things that groups of kenku 
would fall upon at once, tearing apart alive as 
they bespattered their feathers with slug 
entrails. As a slave, I was spared participation 
in such rituals, being given only the wretched 
leavings to eat in dark corners.

But as weeks passed I learned more and more 
about kenku minds. I was able to skim 
information from my companions, first 
sparingly and then more effectively. I learned 
that the Nestlord and Priestess Consort were 
parents to all the other kenku in the band. 
They gained their vast size because they 
received extra shares of food, food which 
allowed them to reproduce constantly but 
which made them too large for all but the most 
ungracefully of flight. I never did see the breeding 
pair leave the nest, and they always seemed to 
walk stiffly and slowly.

The Nestlord and Priestess Consort indeed 
come to require their additional food – several 
times I was pecked for failing to ensure they 
received all they desired before parceling out 
renks or mekillot flesh to the others. Breeders
who are returned to normal rations dwindle and die.

When a Nestlord or Priestess Consort does die, the vacant place is filled by one of the younger kenku. The larger or bolder males will fight for domination to replace the Nestlord, while females who seek the place of the Priestess Consort declare their candidacy and await the choice of the elements. Losers in these contests do not survive.

When the kenku nest grows too large, beyond 50 perhaps, the Nestlord and Priestess Consort permit the older and more accomplished members of the nest to challenge one another. The rituals are the same as occur when one of the breeding pair dies, but in this case the winners do not claim places in the nest but are driven out to found a new nest. Members of the original nest fly out with the new breeding pair, driving them away from the original nest, and then leave them to fend for themselves. Once laid, the kenku eggs are gathered by the nest’s females and removed to special chambers away from the breeding pair. The females which have not been blessed by Silt’s favor are tasked to sit upon the eggs. Only about half the eggs are allowed to hatch, however. Periodically the Nestlord emerges from his chambers to inspect all the eggs, psionically determining whether the hatchling inside has the ability to psionically converge. Those which lack this essential skill – used by the kenku not only for combat but also for most sorts of social interaction – are left unhatched.

How and what other kenku worship I do not know, but the Kk’rass’atk tribe adheres to the Silt faith. Based on gleanings from their minds, I think they have a profound fear of the element that daily threatens them with choking duststorms, blinding sand rains, and the Grey Death. Yet they believe that the Silt also guards the nest’s females and removed to special chambers away from the breeding pair. The females which have not been blessed by Silt’s favor are tasked to sit upon the eggs. Only about half the eggs are allowed to hatch, however. Periodically the Nestlord emerges from his chambers to inspect all the eggs, psionically determining whether the hatchling inside has the ability to psionically converge. Those which lack this essential skill – used by the kenku not only for combat but also for most sorts of social interaction – are left unhatched.

I saw no druids in the Kk’rass’atk nest. By subtle interrogation of one of the senior priestesses I learned, however, that kenku druids do exist. These legendary kenku are outcast, however, driven from the nest when they adopt guarded lands. Kenku place absolute loyalty in the Nestlord and Priestess Consort – druidic devotion to guarded lands interferes with this obedience. No doubt kenku druids are not only extremely rare but well-hidden – if entire tribes of kenku can exist unseen for generations, consider how easily a single druid could remain unknown!

The Kk’rass’atk, are poor warriors but clever traders. They are all adept with their clawed hands, and can pick pockets and do other fine work with ease. I think they all must be natural rogues, gifted with bard-like skills. As they age, the young ones learn more advanced thieving skills, and the males are tutored in tradecraft and psionics. Female kenku learn to tend eggs, and how to perform the various rituals of the Silt faith.

Male kenku are sent out by the Nestlord on trading ventures. The Metalseeker, an advanced trader and mindbender (by kenku standards), carefully plans his patrol’s route, meticulously noting all the cached food supplies and secret camps that his band will use on their journey. I saw several chambers filled with crude maps, where the Metalseekers draft their plans – I think they are careful to avoid areas where they have had troubles in the past, and also they make sure not to visit the same places too frequently, even if they have proven safe and profitable.

The Metalseeking bands take little with them to actually trade, for the kenku produce little that is of value to others. A few bone trinkets and tools, or small stone carvings, such were their wares. From the minds of several returning traders I confirmed that these pittances were used only as models or base material for psionically-created false goods, which the kenku pass off as real. They then move on, or alter their psionically-masked appearances, to avoid retribution when the false goods vanish.

Once a Metalseeking band returned with several bags of metal coins and fragments. The Nestlord was very pleased, and I was ordered to drag the loot to the coldsmith. Kenku are nervous about fire, so they work metal not with furnaces but with psionics. The coldsmiths are mindbenders skilled in reshaping previously forged metal into forms the kenku need. They have little ability to smelt, refine, or forge metal themselves. Now I understood the tribe’s eager desire to gain worked metal in trade.

Kenku do not use metal in the ways we do, for soldiers’ weapons and critical tools. Instead they almost exclusively use metal in specialized hunting weapons. Kenku are poor hunters, as a rule, as they are poor warriors, but they do take prey. The Kk’rass’atk hunt with massive darts, which they call “wind anchors”. A wind anchor is a 4’ long dart made of carefully worked stone, hollowed out and fitted with heavy metal plugs (I saw one plug that weighed 5 lbs or more). The plug is shaped to fit the stone cylinder, positioned so that impact will force the plug down and thus squeeze out the poison contained in the wind anchor’s sharpened tip.

Kenku hunters patrol over the desert alone, each carrying a single wind anchor. The hunter drops the anchor from a great height, using his excellent vision and estimates of the wind to strike the target. The anchor’s great weight and streamlined shape reduce the effects of wind. The force of impact causes the metal plug or streamlined shape reduce the effects of wind. The force of impact causes the metal plug or
I grew accustomed to the ritual of the Kk’rass’atk hunt. The successful hunter would appear back at the nest, squawking and fluffing its feathers to declare its triumph. The other kenku – the true members of the nest, not the lowly slaves – would swiftly collect flensing poles and tarps and fly out with the hunter to carve up the carcass. Flensing poles are 10’ bone poles, or spears, fitted with razor-sharp metal blades, which the kenku coldsmiths form out of forged metals. These flensing poles are too valuable to be used in battle, and are kept secure in the nest when the tribe is not out hacking up prey. When they had cut the carcass into chunks of bearable weight and size, the kenku would use the tarps as slings and haul the meat back to the nest. All this was done with the greatest urgency, for the tribe felt vulnerable and afraid gathered in such numbers in the open waste.

In the depths of the nest are the chambers where meat is kept in cold storage, and where the flensing poles are stored. The Kk’rass’atk caves extended more than 100’ into the cliffs, and had several levels – the inner chambers were cool enough to preserve meat for several days. Longer storage was not needed, for the kenku gorge themselves when food is plentiful and then rely on renks and small insects until the next large kill.

Between the chambers for meat storage and the renk colonies in the very bowels of the cave were two large rooms where the Kk’rass’atk grow their fungus. The kenku eat only meat, but they grow a nasty green-yellow striated bracket fungus which the females distill down into the tribe’s hunting poison. The fungus is hard and woody, and produces little juice, so vast quantities must be grown in order to accumulate enough poison for the wind anchors.

The kenku make use of the large fungus chambers by using them to teach the very youngest of their kind how to fly. As soon as hatchlings are old enough, the females bring them to ledges in the fungus chambers and show them how to fly. Once the fledglings can handle gliding from the rooms’ highest ledges down to the floor, they are permitted to practice outside the nest on the cliffs over the silt.

Watching the young kenku learn to fly, I plotted my escape. I had been among them for four months, and the stench of renk innards was driving me mad. Kenku get all their water from meat, they do not drink, and they take dust-baths, so there was no water anywhere in the nest. I had learned all I could, and was determined to escape further torment by the feather lice that plagued the caves, so one night after the Kk’rass’atk returned inside after sunset, and darkness was deep, I accidentally fell off one of the ledges and into the silt below. If any of the Kk’rass’atk saw me fall, they didn’t consider a slave worth rescuing.

-Spymaster Andapho
Wisdom of Terror

Foreward

You think you have known the Eldaarish: Short, skinny, grey eyes, that certain complexion of the face. So humble and servile in the first generation; so bold, brazen and angry in the second generation. You call these people refugees, but you know little of the place called Eldaarich, and less of the terrors that drive these refugees to take refuge in a life of Kurnan slavery.

Such a frightened, submissive people, you think. They slink penniless to your gates, asking timidly for work. They embrace the role of slavery as worms take to the soil; they refuse to learn to write your characters, or to shoot your longbows, even though learning these skills would entitle them to the privileges and duties of citizens. When asked questions, they answer loudly and clearly but deferentially. They rarely initiate a conversation with a Kurnan, and speak in whispers with their spouse and children. If you stare at them without speaking, they tremble.

The Eldaarish refugees seem like a meek and cowardly people. Yet their children born in Kurn grow as tall as Kurnans, become prominent citizens, and often out-compete your children at contests of wit, will, and strength. How curious that the children of the meek will inherit your city.

How you must fear us. An elf, dwarf, herder, Drylander, or even child of the bandit state that puts down roots in Kurn's foreign quarter, and finds employment in a clave, is accepted as citizen, and her child is called a child of Kurn. The child of Eldaarish parents is called Eldaarish, even though he is a citizen and a skilled artisan in his guild, even though she has served three times as the King’s spy and now shares his name and bed. No one will ever call me a child of Kurn, for terror hides in my shadow.

You know Eldaarich as a place of terrible oppression, a place of famine and terror. Until I returned from my veteran mission, you thought that Eldaarich was oppressive in the same ways as the Seven Cities, only more so. You debriefed dozens of Eldaarish refugees, who all told you similar stories, which you assumed to be the truth. They told you what you wanted to hear.

Daskinor’s Lands

Daskinor’s lands include the Dim Lands, and a separate volcanic chain known as the Huuros Islands. The Dim Lands include the South Guard fort on the mainland, and four islands linked by bridges. A single silt port runs skimmers to the Huuros volcano cluster, which contain Eldaarich’s most productive mines.

The Mud Quarry

Four miles east of South Guard is the mud quarry, the only source of water that I saw in the Dim Lands: a deep-cliffed cove walled off from the silt to expose the mud dozens of feet beneath the silt’s surface. Buckets of mud are pulleyed up the cliffs from the quarry, and water is extracted from the mud in the villages above. The villagers that quarry the mud live in ledges in the rock beneath the cliffs. I could hear the creaking of the pulleys all day and all night.

The Bridges

Five great stone bridges connect the mainland and the four islands that make up the Dim Lands. How these bridges were built simply baffles my imagination. Decades of labor have not completed the bridge at Ledopoldus, and even if Ledopoldans ever complete their project, any of the five Eldaarish bridges would dwarf it.

Fort Mudwatch is designed to keep intruders out, and (just as importantly) to keep the villagers in. Portions of the bridges appear retractable, but I never saw them drawn in. Security seems to rely more on fear than on actual force. Like all Eldaarish architecture, the fortresses seem designed to frighten and intimidate. The watch towers cast threatening shadows across the bridges. Crossing the bridge on foot, one feels as vulnerable as a fly on a white-painted wall.
Grey Death
While there are days where the sky is clear and even the horizon is visible, typically the silt stirs up so that you cannot see farther than sixty feet. One day in three the sun is blocked out and you will need a candle, and still cannot see more than ten feet in front of you. One day in six the air is too thick to breathe without a filter. Drylander Merchants call this phenomenon “the grey death.” The Eldaarish have no name for it; they take it for granted. Since island winds may stir up grey death at any instant, Eldaarish commoners and slaves live and breathe in the masks that the merchants call silters. While the peoples of the Seven Cities go uncovered day to day, and harden their skins from the sun, the Eldaarish (like the Kurnans) are loathe to uncover their bodies, since the sun would burn their overprotected skin. Speaking from experience, I can tell you that the Eldaarish black robes are unbearably hot. They wear these robes from sunrise to sunset, and hide in their brick houses during the night. The silt in the air and around the islands tends to muffle most sounds. A shout does not travel far in Eldaarish air, and The Eldaarish try to get by with gestures when they are outside. When they have to speak, they speak loudly, to overcome not only the muffling of the silt, but the constant sound of the heartbeat drums.

Heartbeat Drums
Unseen outposts keep up a constant drumming on the islands day and night. While I have broken most of the drum-code, I was unable to ascertain exactly how it is that the net of drummers passes messages from one drummer to others miles away. What I can tell you is that when one set of templars learns of a problem, the message is transferred back to the capital miles away within minutes, and instructions return in the same medium -- all without changes to the rhythm that could be discerned by untrained ear. The drummers must be extraordinarily skilled in both hand and ear.

Broken Ground
Except for the island of Daskinor's capital, the isles of Eldaarich are riddled with tunnels and craters. The Eldaarish mine the dim lands for salt, for gems, and for the smoky fire-rock they call coal. Empty and abandoned mines lay gaping everywhere, and fearsome creatures are said to dwell inside, and crawl out at night searching for food. But at night the most feared predators are the other villagers, who often raid for goods when their own village looks like it will fall short on its quota. Every few miles or so in the Dim Lands, a rocky pillar juts from the ground. All of these are narrow except for the great pillar known as The Rock in Eldaarich. Our scholars say that these pillars suggest that the Dim lands are riddled with long-dead volcanoes, but rock-wisdom is beyond my ken. Several of the pillars throughout the Dim lands are used as drummer outposts.

The People of the Dim Islands
Thousands of peasants dwell in tiny isolated villages, each administered by a headman. The headman is given noble status for life — however short that might be. Although the villagers elect one of their own as headman, the demands of the Red Guards will soon place the headman at odds with his community, and he will oppress it as severely as the last one did. Every week or so, the Red Guards arrive at the village with a mekillot wagon. These red-robed, masked templars bring the villages' food and water for the next week, and take the allotted production quota of ore, finished goods, quarried stone, or whatever else the village produces. If the village does not produce the allotted quota, the headman is slain in front of the villagers, and the villagers are expected to produced the full quota by the following week without leadership. Each week, until they succeed, the Red Guards will slay one of the villagers as an example, and will cut the food allotment. Red Guards tend to slay the weakest, the children, or the elderly. When the village finally meets the quota, they are permitted to elect another headman. The strangeness of these scenes is that they occur wordlessly. In my five years in the islands, I never once heard a Red Guard speak. They communicate their will by signs or gestures, but mostly the commoners and headman are forced to guess what it is that Red Guards require of them. When it comes to
precise matters such as quotas or new rules, the Red Guards paint their messages on the walls and on the streets. The elaborate Eldaarish characters Kurnan characters look like simple Kreen scribblings. All Eldaarish are expected to read about a thousand word-characters, but only the templars are allowed to write.

**Eldaarish Literacy**

Mereth presses me on the issue of Eldaarish literacy, forcing me to dedicate a full section on this tedious matter. Here it is:

You believe that your safety and freedom derive from rights that are denied the Seven cities: your right to read, and your right to choose your leaders. Know now that in the islands, the children of Eldaarich also enjoy these skills — possess them I should say, for they do not enjoy them. Some find it impossible to believe that Eldaarish commoners practice reading, supposing that reading leads to free thought and hence to a better, more Kurn-like civilization. I could repeat myself until my fingers were sore, and Mereth will still not believe me: Eldaarish villagers read, and it does not make them free. Whether Mereth likes it or not, literacy can be used as a tool of oppression, when only the oppressors can write, and when the commoners can only read.

Others among my sister-spies do not accept that someone could read an entire lifetime, and never learn to write. I invite you to examine the characters of the Eldaarish texts that I painstakingly copied from the village walls. Unlike the Kurnan script, which simplifies and streamlines the Eldaarish characters, each Eldaarish word-character is strikingly unique (thus easy to recognize) and strikingly difficult to duplicate. No schooling is necessary to learn to recognize a thousand unique symbols, especially when they are before you every day, and others read them out loud. I have seen teams of two or three Red Guards take nearly half an hour to paint motivational catch-phrases such as *God Water!, Work Brings Freedom, or Have you filled your quota?* over the gates of a village. I have seen these things, too, often as a full hour to write inspiring suggestions such as *The v does not have the heart to do it. Our villages seem to be getting a little more food and water than before, and that the headmen’s requisitions seemed to be getting filled. Notices painted on fortress walls promised the villages actual bonuses of food, water, money, and goods for exceeding the quota. The villagers seemed to think that it was some sort of trick, that the Red Guards were trying to lure subversives and gluttons into the open with more benevolent laws. The headmen would rather pass on the reward, and hoard the surplus, in case one week the production falls short.

Eldaarich Trade

For ages, Eldaarich’s late Veiled Alliance controlled a significant underground market between the villages. Since the extermination about four King’s Ages ago, only a few fugitive peddlers have stepped in to fill this void, and the absence of any sort of trade is killing the villages, who for the first time are forced to absolutely depend on the rations and supplies provided by the Red Guards. The Red Guards carry about requisition books, and when they stop at the villages, the headmen can requisition new tools, clothing and other goods from the templars by pointing at the appropriate symbols in the requisition books. The Red Guards note the requisition, and sometimes they deliver. Bribes rarely expedite the process since no one can tell one Red Guard from another beneath those heavy masks.

Many villagers and headmen still possess gold, silver, and ceramic coins minted with Daskinor’s fading likeness. Villagers hardly now what to do with these coins, now that the Veiled Alliance is no more. The closest thing to trade that I saw was the infrequent visiting of traveling peddlers. If a village is lucky, every few months one of these traveling peddlers will come to the visit — usually shortly just after the Red Guards have left.

During the last weeks of my stay in the islands, I observed that the Red Guards were bringing more food and water than before, and that the headmen’s requisitions seemed to be getting filled. Notices painted on fortress walls promised the villages actual bonuses of food, water, money, and goods for exceeding the quota. The villagers seemed to think that it was some sort of trick, that the Red Guards were trying to lure subversives and gluttons into the open with more benevolent laws. The headmen would rather pass on the reward, and hoard the surplus, in case one week the production falls short.

Wisdom of the Drylanders v2

http://athas.org/
Defense in the Villages

Working from dust until dawn, living in fear, restricted from wearing armor or carrying weapons, you would hardly expect the villagers to develop and refine an art of war. And yet they have done precisely that. Each village contains at most eight or nine large buildings housing 10-20 people each, and includes an formidable outer wall and a defensible gate.

The villagers use tools as weapons, and regularly practice fighting with extraordinarily un-weapon-like weapons: rocks and ropes, poles and picks ... I once saw a whole village practicing to use their "buckets" as bludgeoning weapons. Some weapons require assembly before combat: gauntlets filled with gravel and tied to belts... the villagers have an amazing capacity for weapon improvisation. The peddlers that I mentioned are masters of this art, and often spend long hours teaching these defenses to the villagers.

Eldaarish Martial Arts

One of the few things that my parents ever taught me about their land, was the Eldaarish martial art cuurnu, whose name roughly translates to "serenity". I never understood why my parents refused to learn the Kurnan longbow and the spear, and yet secretly practiced an art of fighting with household tools. In my sojourn in the islands, I came to understand that cuurnu is not simply a means of defense, but a means of communication and a means of holding onto sanity in their insane land. At the initiate level, the martial art uses the ubiquitous drums to provide a rhythm for the fighting, although at the higher levels of mastery, the rhythm comes from within the mind of the fighter. Cuurnu also seems to provide advantages to fighting in darkness or dim conditions (since the grey death is so prevalent in the islands). Of all the martial arts that I have encountered, cuurnu seemed the closest to psionics. In cuurnu, a dance can contain a poem, and fight often communicates an argument as well as actual blows. Combatants that look as if to tear each other's throats out, may suddenly stop in mid swing. It seems inexplicable to the ignorant, but if you understood cuurnu, you would understand that they had resolved their differences through this language of gestures, and no longer needed to fight.

There is only so much information I can paint on these cards. If the spymasters would allow me to teach you, I would teach you these skills. Certainly no spy should think of visiting the Dim Lands without knowledge of cuurnu, since it is the sole method of communication between the villages. Years of isolation have reduced the villagers to separate, mutually unintelligible dialects. It is difficult to explain, but the Eldaarish martial art provides gestures and postures that communicate ideas, allowing villagers who perfect their technique often apprentice to a master peddler, and leave the terrible life of the villages. As a parting gift to their families, the apprentice-to-be assists her village on a final raid against a rival village, in order to obtain a body to give the templars, so that the village is not punished for her "escape". Let another village pay the price. It is how things are done in the dim isles.

The Master Peddlers

Every few months, a hooded, dirty-robed peddler approaches the village, carrying a mountain of goods in a pack. These visits usually occur hours after the Red Guards have left the village -- since if the Guards find the peddler, they will slay him.

You would think that the villagers would welcome these travelers, but the climate of fear in the Dim Lands is such that every peddler must be tested. When an unknown peddler comes to a village, the villagers usually send their best warriors to try to kill him, since he could be a rival villager or a templar spy. During the brief time of testing, the peddler refrains from killing the warriors, as a token of friendship to the village. When the village's strongest all lie bruised or unconscious on the ground, the peddler spreads his wares and trade begins.

All of these peddlers are masters of the Eldaarish martial art. They master not only the combat side of the art, but improvise or mime with the postures and gestures, to the point where they can communicate entire stories. I have seen the master peddlers telling these stories for hours, as the villagers (especially the young children!) sit rapt in total silence. I have even seen the villagers share their meager food and drink with the best storytellers.

Villagers who perfect their technique often apprentice to a master peddler, and leave the terrible life of the villages. As a parting gift to their families, the apprentice-to-be assists her village on a final raid against a rival village, in order to obtain a body to give the templars, so that the village is not punished for her "escape". Let another village pay the price. It is how things are done in the dim isles.

The Headmen

If the Dim Lands are a "prison-state," as some say, then headmen are the trustees. The Red Guards despise the headmen as they do the other villagers, but the headmen dress and live as privileged nobles within their village.

When a headman is elected, the Red Guard see to it that he is quickly isolated from his former peers. The day that he is elected, the Red Guards remove him for days of intense training. The headman returns pale and unwilling to speak of what he has endured. Furthermore, the headmen are not permitted to wear the mask or the clothing of the Warriors of the Drylanders v2

http://athas.org/
villagers. They are dressed in gilded clothing that never becomes dusty or dirty, and they wear a thin golden collar that seems to magically allow the headman to breathe in the thickest air without injury. Headmen are also armed with weapons and scourgis to frighten their people into obedience and hard work. The headmen have discretion to determine who works and who rests, who eats and who starves, who gets water for their silt-masks, and who chokes. And yet the villagers possess power over their headman’s life: if they fail to meet the quota, the headman dies. Sometimes this mutual fear brings peace and productiveness to a village, and a few headmen have lived to die of old age or gluttony.

The Red Guards
To maintain the terrifying isolation between the villages, only the Red Guards travel legitimately between villages, and between the villages and the capital. Their silent dominance holds the villages in a pitiless grip. Not a single village that I saw had its own well or source of grain -- all of this comes from the Red Guards. Some of the villages raise flocks of cattle, but they are not allowed to slay them, on penalty of death. The more clever villages raise hidden caves of mushrooms to supplement the food ration, but to be caught is death. The law says that those not content to live from the king’s hand will die by the king’s boot.

When the Red Guards come to collect the quota and to deliver the food and water, they also make a count of the villagers, and collect the dead. They do not keep names, but they keep count of the villagers, and if anyone is missing for the count, two people’s rations are cut permanently from the village’s food and water, and the quota is not decreased. For this reason, whole villages conspire to prevent each other from escaping. When a fellow villager does escape, the village sometimes resorts to extreme measures such as killing someone from another village so as to have a body to give the Red Guards. Once in a great while, an entire village has tried to make a break together. They rarely get far. Those that do make it usually find their way to the gate of Kurn, where they live prosperously as your Kurnans snigger at their fearful demeanors.

The Stalkers
The Red Guards do not represent the villagers' greatest fear. When darkness creeps in and candles burn out, I saw the parents trembling. Huddled their stone fortresses, they told of invisible monsters that stole babies, or switched them in their endals. I thought these stories superstition, until I first perceived a Stalker in the act. I have managed to capture, examine, and destroy nearly a dozen of these Stalkers, and I have stalked over a hundred. Some were

Wisdom of the Drylanders v2
defiler-wizards. Most were mindbenders. Most of them were living beings, human defilers and mindbenders. Four of them (clearly the most powerful ones) were corporeal undead. I suspect that Daskinor kills his defilers and mindbenders when they reach a certain level of ability, so that he might control them more completely. Since the undead never die, Eldaarish may be filled with legions of undead mindbenders.

The Stalkers’ duties appear to include patrolling the countryside, spying on the villagers and templars, relaying messages to the drummers — and stealing and replacing babies. From a practical standpoint, I suppose this business of exchanging babies is Daskinor’s method of preventing inbreeding without breaking the isolation. Even among the templars – I observed the Stalkers spying on their homes as well, in the outskirts of the capital. It stands to reason that their babies are exchanged as well. Standing at the crossways, I used the Way to see Stalkers carrying babies towards the capital, or away from the capital. I assume that they use magic or the Way to determine which children show promise at defiling, priestcraft, or the Way, and which children should be given to the villagers. I doubt that more than half of Eldaarish children are switched by this means. The parents guard the babies furiously, and the stalkers seem unwilling to risk being seen or detected. Surprisingly, the villagers raise the changeling child even though it is not their own. Their practical reason: the templars provide an adult’s allotment of food and water for every baby or child in the village, and do not include a matching adult’s share in the production quota. When the Stalkers are not performing the duties that I described above, they return to the capital.

The Wraiths
The villagers whisper stories of Stalkers taking possession of a living person, but I believe that they are referring to the actions of the incorporeal undead that Eldaarish templars refer to as The Founders. One of these creatures saw through my disguise once, and I barely escaped with my life. I suspect that these Founders are Wraiths.

Occasionally during wartime, whole village populations disappear. Given that the villagers never are permitted to touch weapons, the fact that I never saw a standing Eldaarish army other than the Red Guard, and the stories of savage and fearless Eldaarish warriors that pour out of South Guard and Silt Side, I believe that Daskinor uses wraith-possessed villagers to fight his wars. Wraith-possession could also explain how the demoralized drug-ridden thugs that oversee South Guard, manage to stave off the mantis horde attacks year after year.
leaving Daskinor's real army intact. The wraiths creep out of their bodies subtly after the battle, leaving Daskinor's real army intact. Our templars, alchemists and wizards should devise an area attack that harms only the undead. It has been decades since our last skirmish with Eldaarich, but our allies in Winter's Nest could use an effective weapon.

The Dead Farmers

While much of the grain that feeds the Dimlanders is now purchased from Kurn, this has not always been so. I found farmlands outside the outer walls of the capital, and farmers dressed as villagers: black robes and sileers. At first I assumed that those who produced the food are slaves, as they are in most of the seven cities. But the absence of headman supervisors, and the fact that they work from dusk until dawn, suggests a darker secret about those who harvest the soil. I found that beneath those masks and suits are the animated corpses and skeletons. Daskinor found that beneath those masks and suits are the animated corpses and skeletons. Daskinor

The City of Eldaarich

While each village is a fortress into itself, Eldaarich, the capital, is monstrous to behold. The stonework of Eldaarich is exquisite, designed to arrest the heart with horror and dismay. Despite appearances, I found it surprisingly easy to penetrate Eldaarich's walls, dressed in the robes and mask of a Red Guard. As long as I did not use psionics, as long as I looked like I was about my business, no one intercepted me as I moved through the gates of black stone.

Within the walls of Eldaarich, the ground slopes to the center like a bowl, and then levels in a central oval called the inner city. The sloping outer city includes a small noble district, and the rest is filled with the houses and caves of free citizens. The flat inner city at the center includes the city arena, the Temple of Founders, the Temple of the King's Eye, and hundreds of privileged citizens who for some reason I was unable to fathom live alongside the templars in newer houses at the city center. At the south-eastern edge of the inner city, the Rock, Daskinor's high citadel, juts up like a half-melted candle, climbing to far above the top walls of the city. A steep bridge climbs from the eastern edge of the inner city, to the lower gates of the Rock. Prisoners, alive, dead, and undead, hang in cages beneath the bridge.

If you manage, as I did, to look down on the city from the citadel above, the purpose behind this insane layout becomes frighteningly clear. Most of the homes in the city have a dome or flat roof made of glass -- giving the king a clear view into the building itself. It is as if to tell the king: we have nothing to hide.

It seems that Daskinor has problems with trust. Around the rim of the inner city, a number of barred trap doors lead to various under-villages of laborers. Under-villagers live, work, breed, and die underground, without ever seeing the sun, stars, or sky.

The Temple of the King's Boot

The low, flat, windowless building of the Red Guards sits undisturbed near the Northern gates of the city. Free citizens are expected to contribute at least one qualified boy per generation to the Red Guard or to the Shtas, the Eldaarish order that oversees the slave village of South Guard. The child is selected before it can speak, and the parents never hear from him again. However, they are permitted to burn a red candle in the window, to indicate their contribution to the city. Households without red candles burning are sometimes looted and vandalized by the Red Guard.

The Temple of the King's Hand

In Eldaarich, you find that not all of Daskinor's templars are Red Guards. In fact, the white-garbed templars of The Temple of the King's Hand, also known as the King's Handmaidens, seem as kindly as any Eldaarish. The handmaidens are responsible for all of Eldaarich's legal food distribution. They are also the templars most often in Daskinor's personal presence... they nurse him to health during his fits of insanity, or I should rather say they labor to prolong his brief episodes of lucidity. Supposedly, the Handmaidens are never allowed to leave the city. My guess is that Eldaarich's current experiment with rational inter-city trade is due to a handmaiden who somehow obtained permission to travel to Silt Side. I am fairly confident that Azeth does not negotiate with the Red Guards!

Wisdom of the Drylanders v2

The Temple of the King's Hand is the Handmaidens' complex of storehouses and bakeries, surrounded with a high brown walls covered in murals of bounteous harvests. Food is exchanged for ceramic coins through barred windows, and citizens of Eldaarich often
sustain their power. They have their desperate wards, we could get spies in and out of his citadel, but in the citadel itself, with the King.

The Temple of Founders

The Temple of Founders is a partially open complex of ancient buildings next to the city arena. The Founders are a few hundred statues of ancient templars, warriors, and heroes of Eldaarich. Some of these statues are reputed to speak, and to command the thousands of wraiths that inhabit the lower levels of the temple. I do not know if the Founders are real, or if the statues are simply possessed by wraiths; most likely the Founders are the wraiths themselves, and the statues are the images of the people that they once were, or imagine that they were.

The Nobles often consult with the Founders while running the Arena games next door. The Founders also consult with the Red Guard raiding parties that sometimes leave the Dim lands against the herders, the Aarakokra, and, until an age ago, against Kurnan villages. Sometimes these hunting parties are accompanied by wraith-possessed villagers, who return to Eldaarich with foreign prisoners and animals who are to die in the arena games, for the entertainment of Daskinor and his people.

Orkuta Temple

Across from the Temple of the King’s Hand in New Market Square, another set of templars, the blue-robed Haleban, sell the worked goods brought in by the Red Guards. For some reason the Haleban seem to be contained to the inner city, but not to the citadel. The Haleban have an odd collection of duties – they oversee construction of public works, distribute worked goods, and run the state schools. They are totally unarmed except for walking canes, live alongside privileged citizens within the inner city, and yet for some reason the Eldaarish seem to fear them as much as they fear the Red Guards.

The Rock

Built on a great basalt pillar, the King’s citadel, known as The Rock, looms hundreds of feet above the city, its insane spire rising above the highest dust clouds. Most of the citadel is empty, except for a few favorites - unfortunate handmaidens who are condemned to spend every moment soothing the erratic King.

I noted another organization in the citadel: The Watchers, a group of powerful psions who maintain the unparalleled psionic defenses over the Dim Lands. The Watchers spend days at a time in a state of convergence, dropping out to rest and regain psychic strength. At least one of the converged psions must be living, so that the Watchers can switch personalities with an unfortunate whose harbinger crosses their interpretive fields. As you may have heard from the school gossips, this is how my own interesting sojourn into Eldaarich began.

Postscript: Eldaarich in Recent Years – and Future Ages

In the six years since I first painted Wisdom of Terror, the number of Eldaarish refugees has increased, and they bring stories of changes within the Dim Lands that I have chosen to add to my card. After decades of persistence, House Azeth has managed to open negotiation with Eldaarish templars, and so for the first time in ages, Kurnan food, water, and clothing are exchanged for Eldaarish gold, silver, and copper through Azeth’s trade village at Silt Side.

Recent Eldaarish refugees also bring back talk of an anti-psionic purge in Eldaarich – even the templars banned from using psionics on pain of death. It is not that I think Daskinor is too sane to make such a blunder, but rather than I find the news too good to believe. If this news were true, and if the prohibition held, then Daskinor’s ages-old hold on the islands would falter. There is no way he could have kept such tight control for two thousand years without the power of his psionic templars and undead. Without the psionic wards, we could get spies in and out of his borders as easily as we do in the Seven Cities. Perhaps Kurnan wizards might even be able to revive the Eldaarish Veiled Alliance.

My training and experience teaches me to distrust appearances. I do not see liberty on the Eldaarish horizon. Some templars are clearly distrust appearances. I do not see liberty on the Eldaarish horizon. Some templars are clearly
people by the throat; if their grip loosens it is only because they do not wish their prey to strangle. Tighten—loosen—tighten again … it is a dangerous dance that has lasted dozens of ages in the dim islands.

If you are ever assigned to Eldaarich, may you be ready. Do not volunteer for such assignments unless you have nerves of steel and a mind of ice. Weigh my words carefully before you set foot into the land of endless drums.

-Prodigy, Veteran Spy
Wisdom of the Drylanders v2

Wisdom of the Storm Coast

Eleven years have passed and much has changed since Prodigy first painted “Wisdom of Terror.” The Dragon is dead. Sorcerors-kings are missing or dead, some of their cities fallen to chaos, and some have new masters. And in the five years since Prodigy painted the post-script to her work on Eldaarich, our own organization has seen some change as well. So naturally, some of you ask why we keep the ramblings of a defected traitor in our decks of wisdom. I never trusted Prodigy, and her hostility to me and to others in our organization is apparent in the words of her report, but I am persuaded that when she wrote “Wisdom of Terror,” she had not yet even thought of betraying Kurn or defecting to the Order. More importantly, subsequent missions by more reliable agents have confirmed most of Prodigy’s claims about Eldaarich. Our operatives in House Azeth confirm that the timing of Azeth’s first shipment to Kerillis correspond to the increases in rations and supplies that Prodigy reported were delivered to the villages. “Wisdom of Terror” paved the way for a handful of spies and overoptimistic Kurnan wizards to enter the Dim Lands. Prodigy’s suggestions of reviving a Veiled Alliance have proved a deadly fiasco for some of our wizards, but most of them returned alive, thanks in no small part to the Wisdom that Prodigy brought us eleven years ago. In this card, I will bring you up to date on what we have learned about the Dim Lands, before focusing my discussion on the Storm Coast, South Guard, and Fort Mudwatch.

New developments since Prodigy’s mission to the Dim Lands:

House Azeth’s Trade with Eldaarich

As “prophesied” by Azeth wind priests, an Eloy herder named Korik who married into House Azeth has risen to lead that house to greatness. Korik Azeth seems to have established an unprecedented relationship of trust with Kerillis, High Templar of the Kulag fleet. Those of you who have read Spymaster Andapho’s recent Wisdom of the Kulag fleet, consider what this means. Each of the seven Eldaarish orders mistrusts the others, but the Kulags seem to be the best at keeping their secrets, and sailing the sea of silt seems to fill them with the spirit of independence. And yet the Kulag leader appears to have formed a trusting relationship with Korik Azeth, a man that could almost pass for a Kurnan. Needless to say, we are watching House Azeth more closely these days.

Psionics in the Dim Lands

For some reason Daskinor has banned even his most trusted servants from using psionics. Only Daskinor himself is exempt from the ban. This move has created obvious caps in Daskinor’s surveillance of the land. Daskinor’s servants have managed to conceal some of their psionic agents from Daskinor; the Kulag fleet remains afloat through psionics, for example, and some of the drummers on the edges of the dim lands appear to use psionics to conceal themselves.

It appears that the “stalkers” no longer exist. Spymaster Andapho’s brief but fruitful penetration of the Red Guard revealed that much. It seems that the different Eldaarish Orders were all too eager to catch and denounce each other’s psionic agents, and the Red Guards had never liked the stalkers or understood their purpose. Before deserting her second mission in Eldaarich and defecting to the Order, Prodigy reported that the organization of watchers no longer existed, so Daskinor apparently purged that organization entirely along with other psionic servants. Nevertheless, powerful psionic wards over Eldaarich and the Dim Lands remain in place, although the danger of attempting to penetrate them seems to have diminished.

The Psionic Wards on the Dim Lands

Our psionic loremasters suggest that this means that the wards are powered by some psionic artifact, possibly controlled by Daskinor himself, whereas the artifact used to be controlled by multiple psions, these “watchers.” This means we can expect to find gaps in the system. Daskinor on his own may be distracted. But the wards still pose a significant threat, and we do not use magic or psionics to peer into, transport into, or communicate with persons in the Dim Lands, let alone into Eldaarich itself. The ever ingenious Spymaster Andapho has shown us that the protective field does not extend to the Huuros Islands, but I am not sure what use we can make of this information at present. The
inner ward protects the city itself. The outer circle wards off most of the Storm Coast.

The Storm Coast

The Storm Coast is the area where the Trembling Plains meets the sea of silt. The Storm Coast plays host to violent annual clashes between the two regions’ weather systems and inhabitants. For most of the year, the Storm Coast’s weather is no different than that of the Trembling Plains, but the Mudflood season brings lightning storms lasting up to a week that are so violent and constant that one cannot tell whether it is day or night.

Some element in the dust in this region causes frequent lightning storms, particularly when there are irregular winds. Lightning always strikes the same place twice in the Storm Coast. If you get struck by lightning, and survive, then move! When a lightning storm approaches, wise travelers will lie down, or at least hold their spears and pole arms horizontally rather than vertically. Tall creatures such as half giants are in particular danger of being struck by lightning while standing up during a lightning storm. Lightning often sets fire to the scrublands, but the frequency of lightning and fires prevents the dry brush from building up.

These lightning storms interfere with psionics, blanketing the area with the equivalent of the catapsi power. The cause for this phenomenon is unknown. Kurnan sages that have gone to study the matter ended up enslaved at South Guard, and those that survived their seven years of slavery seemed to have lost their interest in the question when they returned to Kurn. We have not yet determined how the lightning storms interact with Daskinor’s ward along the same coast.

South Guard

Separated by four miles of bridge, South Guard and Fort Mudwatch in some respects function as a single compound. Red Guards supply drinkable water to South Guard as they do to their craft villages, but unlike the craft villages, the South Guard slave camps produce their own food, and possibly more than half of the food in the Dim Lands. Aside from than the wells controlled by the Takrit Order in Eldaarich itself, the Red Guards’ operation at Camp Zero and Fort Mudwatch appear to produce most of the drinkable water consumed in the Dim Lands. In other words, without South Guard and Fort Mudwatch, Eldaarich would have no means of supporting any of the sixty-odd slave-camps that Prodigy referred to as the “villages.” Eldaarich would lose its ability to produce weapons, armor, and virtually all other goods.

You already know about South Guard, the largest slave camp in the known world. Until Prodigy’s mission to the Dim Lands, almost everything that the School of Spies knew about those lands came from the mouths of South Guard slaves that had escaped or had been released after surviving seven years of labor. Most slaves at South Guard were captured from herder clans on the mainland. Their overseers are the Shtas, a lesser templar order that completely depends on provisions and equipment that the Red Guard provide, or refuse to provide, at their whim. Shtas soldiers are demoralized and unequipped, and at South Guard, face overwhelming foes, harsh weather, and must keep charge of angry foreign slaves that outnumber them eight to one.

The Red Guards do not keep barracks in South Guard, but patrol it periodically. It seems that the Shtas overseers are as prone to run away as the slaves.

In recent years, the Shtas have surprisingly adopted Trembling Plains’ the seven-year law on slavery. Do not mistake this for mercy. Most South Guard slaves die before their seven years are up, from thirst, mistreatment, and overwork. Those that cannot work die for the amusement of the guards. But the seven-year rule has reduced the number of slave escapes, and gives slaves just enough hope to keep them working. Slaves caught trying to, start their seven years over again.

In the last week of Flamesky, there is invariably at least one massive thr-trin attack against South Guard. The fact that there are more two-legged meat creatures guarding the four-legged meat creatures at South Guard than in the other forts does not dissuade the hungrier thr-trin from attacking South Guard.

Within the city of Eldaarich, the Shtas Browncoats officers provide the honeyed voices to recruit foolish Eldaarish youths to service in the Shtas. Other Browncoats become responsible for putting and keeping these fools
in harm’s way. At South Guard, Browncoaks prevent desertion by a combination of patriotism, coercion, terror, and a generous supply of psychoactive and addictive substances. And yet South Guard somehow manages to survive the yearly wave of mantis attacks during the Flamesky Season.

But the fact that South Guard withstands the Flamesky trin attacks, year to year, despite its bungling leadership and demoralized under equipped guards, suggests something subtle is afoot. Our reports describe year after year, that South Guard looks on the brink of succumbing to trin attack – when suddenly a handful of slaves and guards stop fleeing, and turn and dismember their attackers with courage and grace. These “replaceable heroes,” as the Shtas call them, usually die, when other suddenly “take up the standard.” In my mind, this is sufficient evidence to support Prodigy’s theory about the wraiths.

Fort Mudwatch

Prodigy briefly discussed how the Red Guards obtain drinkable water in Fort Mudwatch, but I think the process deserves more attention here. Huge pullies lift the mud from Camp Zero to Fort Mudwatch at the top of the cliffs. Huge pitiful creatures that the Red Guards call “giant halfs” man the pullies beneath the cliffs. These “giant halfs” appear to be silt giants whose legs have been amputated to prevent them from escaping.

At the top of the cliff, large rectangular buckets dump the mud into a large trench, and the mud eventually makes its way into one of several settling tanks called heptynders. When one heptynder fills up, the Red Guard alchemists direct the mud towards another heptynder.

Wisdom of the Drylanders v2

After allowing the mud to settle for a few days, the alchemists remove the now-clear liquid from above the settled sediment, and carry it in large wheeled buckets to tall pointed buildings that the Red Guards call heptamids. Heptamids are built from lightning glass taken from the Storm Coast, and mortared with what appears to be lead. It takes several Red Guards to seal the white round door, turning it shut like a screw: During the day, steam hisses from cracks in the heptamids, which are known to occasionally explode; there always seems to be at least one heptamid being rebuilt.

When a heptamid stops hissing with steam, the Red Guards know that the water has all boiled off, forcing most of the steam into underground caverns to cool into drinkable water. They unscrew the door, scrape up the dry residue contaminants of the water boiled away, and seal more impure water in the heptamid for purification.

To the point: If one were to destroy all of the heptamids at once, creating large enough cracks for all of the steam to escape in each heptamid, then the Dim Lands would be deprived of nearly half of its water supply.

The inhumanity of my proposal does not
escape my attention. The slaves at South Guard — some of them Kurnan, most of them Eloy — would be the first to die, but the Shtas at South Guard and the Red Guards would also go thirsty. Those two groups constitute the vast majority of Eldaarich’s land-based military forces. We have been unable to verify or disprove Prodigy’s claims about the mysterious Founders, other than the temple exists in Eldaarich as she described it. But the stories of South Guard’s “replaceable heroes,” combined with South Guard’s otherwise inexplicable survival, force us to presume that Eldaarich indeed possesses an active Wraith army. An Eldaarish attack would probably take the form of wraith-possessed humanoids or cattle. While we are developing countermeasures for the wraith, the most likely way for Kurn to survive would be to draw the wraith army’s attention away from Kurn. The South Guard-Mudwatch complex, along with “Camp Zero,” is vulnerable, and sufficiently important, I believe, to draw an attacking army home.

—Spymaster Mereth
Appendix: Skills, Feats and Prestige Classes

Skills:

**Literacy (Picts)**
Kurn, Eldaarich, and many of the peoples of the Trembling Plains use an ideographic writing system known as Picts, where a single symbol corresponds to an idea. People that speak drastically different languages can communicate with each other in writing if both of them have the *Literacy (Picts)* skill. Picts are compact and take up less space than alphabetical writing, but painting picts is a slow and laborious process.

**Speak Language (Cuurnu)**
This is an Eldaarish code of body language, and has a limited vocabulary. Cuurnu is closely associated with a martial art of the same name. In Cuurnu, a dance can contain a poem, and fight often communicates an argument as well as actual blows.

**Speak Language (Neshtap Hand Signals)**
This is the language of the Neshtap, who do not speak verbally.

**Speak Language (Savak Drumcode)**
This is the language of the heartbeat drums. Anyone with this skill can understand the heartbeat drums, or could communicate ideas to someone else who knew the language, by clapping or otherwise simulating a drum. However, to use the heartbeat drums to communicate the code over long distances, you need the *Perform (Drums)* skill. See also the Code Drummer Feat.

Feats

**Coldsmith**
You use psionics to work metal, without heat or fire.

**Prerequisites:** Kenku, psionic focus

**Benefits:** You can work metal without heat or fire, using psionics to temporarily soften the metal as if it had been heated. This feat has no combat application since you must be in contact with the metal for at least ten minutes for this power to work. Goldsmithing takes double the time as conventional metalworking.

**Normal:** Without this feat, you need heat and/or fire in order to work any metal harder than gold or lead.

**Maintenance Focus [Regional]**
You can focus on protecting a person, object or community.

**Prerequisites:** Dwarf, Charisma 13+

**Benefits:** You can apply your dwarven focus bonus to protect a person, object or community, even though this is a general purpose that cannot be “accomplished.” Any act directly related to protecting the person, object, or community, receives the morale bonus normally associated with the dwarven focus. Setting a maintenance focus requires an hour of quiet meditation. A dwarf with this feat can focus on preserving his own life, but only a corrupt dwarf would do so, and other dwarves would hold him in contempt.

**Normal:** A dwarf normally only gets the benefit of focus when there is an objective that can be accomplished. A focus must take at least a week to complete; anything less than that is too simple a task to be considered a focus.

**Vow [General]**
You can increase the power of your focus with an irrevocable vow.

**Region:** Dwarf, Base attack bonus +3 or greater.

**Benefits:** In addition to the benefits of a dwarven focus, you gain a +3 morale bonus to any one skill check when you are pursuing an avowed objective. Making a vow requires that you already have the objective as your dwarven focus, and requires that you take one hour to mediate quietly. You decide which skill to enhance when you make the vow. Once made, a vow is irrevocable until accomplished. You cannot change your focus until you have fulfilled your vow.

Prestige Classes

**Browncloak**
Dating back to the early Cleansing Wars, the Shtas are the most ancient of Daskinor’s Orders still in operation, and may be the most ancient existing templar organization on Athas. Regardless of their past glories, the Shtas today are little more than puppets of the Red Guards; their outlying posts such as South Guard completely depend on provisions and equipment that the Red Guard provide, or refuse to provide, at their whim. Shtas soldiers are demoralized and unequipped, and at South Guard, face overwhelming foes, harsh weather, and must keep charge of angry foreign slaves that outnumber them eight to one.

Shtas Officers, the Browncloaks, provide the honeyed voices to recruit foolish Eldaarish youths to service in the Shtas. Other Browncloaks become responsible for putting and keeping these fools in harm’s way. Browncloaks prevent desertion by a combination of patriotism, coercion, terror,
Wisdom of the Drylanders v2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BAB</th>
<th>Fort</th>
<th>Ref</th>
<th>Will</th>
<th>Special</th>
<th>Spells Per Day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>+0</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>Manipulator, Rebuke Undead, Poison Use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>+0</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>“Medicinal Purposes”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>Patch Together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>+5</td>
<td>+5</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>+5</td>
<td>War Caster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>+5</td>
<td>+5</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>+5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>+6</td>
<td>+6</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>+6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>+6</td>
<td>+6</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>+6</td>
<td>Quicken Undeath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>+7</td>
<td>+7</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>+7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and a generous supply of psychoactive and addictive substances.

Since Shtas posts are typically undermanned, Shtas soldiers cannot be allowed to quit fighting merely because they’ve had a limb or a head torn off. Shtas officers are especially adept at animating and commanding the dead corpses of soldiers under their command. Some Shtas officers would prefer to dispense with the living soldiers altogether, since zombies are so much more obedient, and never complain about the quantity or quality of rations. Alas, the laws of Eldaarich give the Shtas no rights to keep the bodies of dead humanoids. Naturally, the Browncloaks violate this law whenever they can get away with it.

Requirements

Alignment: Evil

Skills: Diplomacy 7 ranks, Bluff 7 ranks

Special: Rebuke undead, cast 2nd level divine spells spontaneously and promotion to officer in the Shtas Order

Class Skills

Class skills: Bluff, Craft, Diplomacy, Heal, Intimidate, Knowledge (Local), Knowledge (Religion), Ride, Psicraft, Sense Motive, Spellcraft.

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int modifier.

Class Features

Weapon: All Martial Weapons, Whip, Bolas, Lasso

Armor: All Armors, All Shields, including tower shields.

Hit Dice: d8

Manipulator (ex): From duping potential recruits to bullying terrified troops, the Browncloak is a skilled manipulator, gaining +2 to Bluff, Diplomacy, and Intimidate.

Rebuke Undead (su): Browncloaks gain +3 to their effective templar level when rebuking undead, and Browncloak levels stack with Templar levels for purposes of rebuking undead. This effectively puts the Browncloak at a par with evil clerics for purposes of rebuking undead.

Poison Use (ex): Browncloaks can apply poisons without a 5% chance of accidentally poisoning themselves.

“Medicinal Purposes” (ex): A Browncloak can learn the Craft (Alchemy) skill, and gains +4 to Craft (Alchemy) checks to prepare drugs that are psychoactive, addictive, or both.

Patch Together (sp): At will, a Browncloak’s Heal skill expands to include a new option, “Patch together” (DC 10). Patching a wounded creature takes 1 full round and converts 1d6 points of damage into an equal amount of nonlethal damage. If the Heal check fails, no damage is converted and the target suffers 1d4 points of damage. A creature may only be Patched Together once per day.

Leadership (ex): A Browncloak gains the Leadership feat, gaining command of the number of Shtas soldier followers indicated by his Leadership score. If the Browncloak already has the Leadership feat, then he gains +2 to his Leadership score. The Browncloak’s followers may be living or undead, if a living follower dies and the Browncloak animates the follower.

War Caster (Ex): The Browncloak is disciplined and coolheaded in the heat of battle. He can take 10 on Concentration checks to cast spells defensively. He also gains a +2 bonus to Will saves against Enchantment (Charm) and (Compulsion) effects.
Quicken Undeath (Sp): At 9th Level, the Browncloak can cast Animate Dead as a swift action. The Browncloak uses the normal spell slot to cast the spell, e.g. 3rd level for Animate Dead.

Call on the Founders (Ex): At tenth level, the Browncloak is initiated into the dark secrets of the organization's inner circle. This initiation involves meeting the persons that founded the Shtas organization thousands of years ago, “The Founders,” as these persons are known, served Daskinor long ago, and are now Athasian Wraiths. Once per week, the Browncloak may summon two Athasian wraiths from the Temple of the Founders in Eldaarich. The Browncloak cannot command or rebuke these Wraiths when they arrive, since the Founders are the Browncloak's superior officers. The Founders will do what needs to be done to protect what they see as Eldaarich's interests, by possessing bodies and fighting enemies, but when the battle is over, if they perceive that the Browncloak has been negligent or incompetent in his command, the Founders will seize the Browncloak and take him back to the Temple of the Founders for judgment.

Red Guard

In the Dim Lands, the Red Guard epitomizes terror. Red Guards are the elite officers of the Neshtap Order, which extorts tribute from Eldaarich's client villages on behalf of the sorcerer-king Daskinor. Other than the watchful Neshtap patrols, very little travels the bridges or roads from Silt Side and South Guard, to the walls of Eldaarich itself. Candidates for the Neshtap are selected at birth and taught hatred and contempt of other sentient creatures. Red Guards have camaraderie only with other members of the Neshtap, and with their trained animals.

In combat, the Red Guards exploit the common silt fogs of the Dim Lands to their advantage in combat. Their spells help them to enflame and fire arrows from concealment, and to mislead enemies about their position, they hit-and-run in the mist; sometimes lassoing and dragging an enemy party member away into the mist. Their strategy is to break their enemies apart so they can pick them off one by one in the mist, perhaps capturing one of them alive. While other sadists get most pleasure from inflicting actual physical pain and death, a Red Guard find most pleasure in his enemies' terror and anguish as their companions die horribly before their eyes. For example, the Red Guards will often burn a captive alive on a hilltop on a clear night, in view of her comrades. Alternately, if the Red Guards fear that the party might be brave enough to try to rescue their comrade, they might crucify the prisoner, after drenching her in oil and magically trapping the area around her to burst into flame when her allies come within range for a rescue. The Red Guards enjoy their notoriety, and often allow a single person escape their massacres, to spread the story.

Hit Die: d8.

Requirements

To qualify to become a Red Guard, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Race: Character must be able to pass for Human

Alignment: Any evil.

Feats: Point-Blank Shot

Skills: Handle Animal (4 ranks), Speak Language (Savak Drumcode), Speak Language (Neshtap Hand Signals).

Special: The character must be male, and have been taken by the Neshtap as a child, and must have refrained from speaking verbally for at least four years.

Class Skills

The Red Guard's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Handle Animal (Cha), Heal (Wis), Hide (Dex), Knowledge (Nature), Intimidate (Cha), Ride (Dex), Spot (Wis), Survival (Wis), Use Rope (Dex). See Chapter 4 of the Player's Handbook for skill descriptions.

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the Red Guard prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Composite Longbow, Lasso
Wish of the Drylanders v2

Vow of Silence. Long ago, Daskinor ordered the Red Guards’ tongues cut out, because he did not want them to fraternize, fearing that they might disobey his orders against fraternizing with the citizens and slaves. The Red Guards no longer cut their tongues out (it inhibited spellcasting). They still do not speak; they use drums and hand signs to communicate with each other. A Red Guard who speaks verbally to a non-Red Guard loses all special benefits until he atones by confessing to the High Templar of the Neshtap, and accepts the High Templar’s punishment. The severity of the punishment depends on the circumstances, such as whether the Red Guard spoke to a fellow member of the Neshtap, to an Eldaarish citizen, to a slave, or (worst of all) to a foreigner or to a member of a different order. Severity also depends on whether this was the Red Guard’s first offense—the second punishment is always more severe than the first. The three possible punishments are: (1) brand him, (2) cut his tongue cut out, (3) bury him alive.

The Eldaarish people and the slave-villagers all believe that the Neshtap still have their tongues cut out, which is what the Neshtap want them to believe.

Enflame Arrow. As a swift action, a Red Guard can cause his arrow to burst into flame as it leaves his bow. Enflamed arrows cause +1 fire damage with each hit. The damage increases to +2 at 5th level, and to +3 at 9th level. At 9th level, the Red Guard can enflame his arrows as a free action, allowing him to fire multiple Enflamed arrows in the same round.

Catch Fire. Targets struck with Enflamed arrows or melee weapons must make a Reflex Save (DC 15) or be set on fire. See page 303 of the Dungeon Master Guide for rules on catching fire. Red Guards are immune to this effect from each others’ arrows. Until 10th level, the Red Guard can only use the Catch Fire ability a limited number of times per day equal to his Charisma modifier plus his Red Guard level. A 10th level Red Guard can use his Catch Fire ability an unlimited number of times per day.

Silt Eyes. At second level, the Red Guard’s enhanced senses reduce the effect of concealment on him by 10%, and he becomes immune to the Grey Death. At fifth level, the Red Guard’s enhanced senses reduce the effect of concealment by a total of 20%.

Enflame Melee Weapon. As a move-equivalent action, a Red Guard can cause his melee weapon to burst into flame for one minute/Red Guard Level. Enflamed melee weapons gain the same bonus as the character’s enflamed arrows, and also have the potential to cause the target to catch fire. The flame does not consume or harm a melee weapon.

Sending. At 7th level, the Red Guard can instantly communicate a short thought of 25 words or less, to any other Red Guard, at any distance. The Red Guard can use this spell-like ability up to three times per day.

ArcheryFeat. The Red Guard can take any archery related feat: Far Shot, Precise Shot,
Rapid Shot, Manyshot, Shot on the Run, Improved Precise Shot, Psionic Shot, Greater Psionic Shot, Fell Shot, Return Shot, Weapon Focus (Longbow), Greater Weapon Focus (Longbow).

Spellcaster Progression
At every even level, the Red Guard increases his spellcasting ability, if he has any. The Red Guard does not gain any other benefit a character of either character class would have gained (bonus metamagic or item creation feats, psicrystal special abilities, and so on). If the Red Guard gains spells through more than one base class, then at 2nd level he must decide to which class he adds his Red Guard levels for purpose of determining spells known, spells per day and caster level, or power points per day.

As an additional benefit, the animal companion benefits from any spell stick that the Red Guard uses, so long as the animal companion remains within 30 feet of the Red Guard. (Spell sticks are a special magic item to be detailed in Lost Cities of the Trembling Plains.) Mounted Red Guards almost invariably take Crodlu as their animal companions; nonmounted Red Guards almost invariably take Jhakhar as their companions.

Double Templar
Double Templars are trained to spy on foreign states for long periods of time. Of all the sorcerer-kings, Oronis has the most ambitious spy program, but other city-states have their spies and sleepers as well. Double templars sometimes pass themselves off as templars of another city-state, passing loyalty tests, deceiving psionic probes, and even channeling a foreign sorcerer-king’s spell power.

Requirements
To qualify to become a Double Templar, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Feats: Deceitful
Skills: Bluff (8 ranks), Gather Information (5 ranks), Literacy, Disguise (5 ranks), Speak Language (at least one foreign city-state), Spellcraft (5 ranks)
Spells: Comprehend Languages, Undetectable

Class Skills
The Double Templar class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Autohypnosis (Wis), Bluff (Cha), Concentration (Con), Decipher Script (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Disguise (Cha), Gather Information (Cha), Knowledge (All), Listen (Wis), Perform (Cha), Profession (Int), Psicraft (Wis), Search (Wis), Sleight of Hand (Dex), Speak Language (none), Spellcraft (Int), Spot (Wis), Use Magic/Psionic Item (Cha). See Chapter 4 of the Player’s Handbook for skill descriptions.

Skill Points at Each Level: 6 + Int modifier.

Class Features:
Hit Die: d6
Double-Minded: The character gains a +1 Will bonus per Double Templar level against any magical or psionic attempt to read or control her mind or emotions. If the Double Templar makes a successful saving throw against any magical or psionic attempt to read or control his mind, he can attempt a successful Bluff check against his attacker’s Sense Motive. If this Bluff is successful, the attacker believes that he was successful, and the Double Templar can “feed” the attacker false information. For example, if a Double Templar was captured and examined psionically with the Mind Probe power, she could learn what her captors wished to discover, and choose what information that they “found,” if he made a successful saving throw and Bluff check. A person using Mind Probe against a sleeping Double Templar does not get an automatic answer to their question; the Double Templar gets a saving throw to avoid giving a truthful answer to that first question.

Two-Faced: The character gains +1 competence bonus per Double Templar level to her Disguise and Bluff skills.

Poison Use (ex): The Double Templar can use poisons without the 5% danger of...
Wisdom of the Drylanders v2

49

1 round per level of the Double Templar. If the victim's saving throw succeeds, the attack deals normal damage.

The Double Templar can only use this ability if the victim trusted her immediately prior to the attack, i.e. the victim currently had a "friendly" disposition to the Double Templar.

NPCs

Founder

Athasian Wraith Human Fighter 10
Lawful Evil Medium Humanoid
Init +8 Improved Initiative
Languages Classic Eldaarish
AC 18 (Dodge, Mobility)
Hp 107
Saves Fort +10, Ref +11, Will +11
Speed 30 feet (6 squares), Spring Attack
Melee [Possessing human]: 1d4+4+[host's strength bonus]
Base Atk +13, Grp (+18 Corporeal)
Atk Options: Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Whirlwind Attack,
Special Actions: Animate object, heart grip, possession, Strength damage, taint weapon

Abilities Str 0 Dex 18 Con 0 Int 14 Wis 14 Cha 14
SQ Darkvision 60 ft., enduring focus, incorporeal traits, necromant, temporary corporeality, undead traits, vulnerability to raise dead

Feats Alertness, Improved Initiative, Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Mobility, Spring Attack, Whirlwind Attack, Improved Unarmed Strike, Weapon Focus, [Unarmed], Greater Weapon Focus, [Unarmed], Weapon Specialization, [Unarmed], Greater Weapon Specialization, [Unarmed],
Skills Diplomacy +6, Hide +14, Intimidate +24, Jump +18, Listen +14, Search +12, Sense Motive +12, Spot +20

NPC: Spymaster Mereth

CR 18
Female Human Templar/13 Double Templar/5
LN medium humanoid(human)
Init +1; Senses Listen +2, Spot +2
Languages Common, Eloy, Elven, Kurnan, Tyrian
AC 25, touch 16, flat-footed 24 (+1 Dex, +5 deflection, +6 armor, +3 shield)
hp 79 (18 HD)
Immune Detect thoughts, discern lies, detect alignment
Mereth is the School of Spies’ expert on the tablelands, and the only member of the school of spies with the distinction of having served as another sorcerer-king’s High Templar. Before promoting her to High Templar, Kalak himself probed Mereth and could not discern treachery in her heart. As far as anyone in Tyr knows, Mereth died as loyally as she lived; Kalak himself attended her funeral. Mereth accomplished deception by sculpting her body out of stone, using a Stone to Flesh scroll to complete the resemblance, and disguising herself to hire an assassin to “kill” the body laying in her bed.

In Kurn, Mereth often meets with people from the Tablelands, to find out what information she can. She often has a young trainee along to observe Mereth’s disarming way of gathering information, but the trainee is alone to observe. Mereth is married to a wizard that belongs to the Scholar’s clave. Mereth and her husband can often be found in Kurn’s great library.
Open Game License

OPEN GAME LICENSE Version 1.0a

The following text is the property of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. and is Copyright 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc. ("Wizards"). All Rights Reserved.

1. Definitions: (a) "Contributors" means the copyright and/or trademark owners who have contributed Open Game Content; (b) "Derivative Material" means copyrighted material including derivative works and translations (including into other computer languages), potation, modification, correction, addition, extension, upgrade, improvement, compilation, abridgment or other form in which an existing work may be recast, transformed or adapted; (c) "Distribute" means to reproduce, license, rent, lease, sell, broadcast, publicly display, transmit or otherwise distribute; (d) "Open Game Content" means the game mechanic and includes the methods, procedures, processes and routines to the extent such content does not embody the Product Identity and is an enhancement over the prior art and any additional content clearly identified as Open Game Content by the Contributor, and means any work covered by this License, including translations and derivative works under copyright law, but specifically excludes Product Identity. (e) "Product Identity" means product and product line names, logos and identifying marks including trade dress; artifacts; creatures characters; stories, storylines, plots, thematic elements, dialogue, incidents, language, artwork, symbols, designs, depictions, likenesses, formats, poses, concepts, themes and graphic, photographic and other visual or audio representations; names and descriptions of characters, spells, enchantments, personalities, teams, persons, likenesses and special abilities; places, locations, environments, creatures, equipment, magical or supernatural abilities or effects, logos, symbols, or graphic designs; and any other trademark or registered trademark clearly identified as Product identity by the owner of the Product Identity, and which specifically excludes the Open Game Content; (f) "Trademark" means the logos, names, mark, sign, motto, designs that are used by a Contributor to identify itself or its products or the associated products contributed to the Open Game License by the Contributor (g) "Use", "Used" or "Using" means to use, Distribute, copy, edit, format, modify, translate and otherwise create Derivative Material of Open Game Content. (h) "You" or "Your" means the licensee in terms of this agreement.

2. The License: This License applies to any Open Game Content that contains a notice indicating that the Open Game Content may only be Used under and in terms of this License. You must affix such a notice to any Open Game Content that you Use. No terms may be added to or subtracted from this License except as described by the License itself. No other terms or conditions may be applied to any Open Game Content distributed using this License. 3. Offer and Acceptance: By Using the Open Game Content You indicate Your acceptance of the terms of this License.

4. Grant and Consideration: In consideration for agreeing to use this License, the Contributors grant You a perpetual, worldwide, royalty-free, non-exclusive license with the exact terms of this License to Use, the Open Game Content.

5. Representation of Authority to Contribute: If You are contributing original material as Open Game Content, You represent that Your Contributions are Your original creation and/or You have sufficient rights to grant the rights conveyed by this License.

6. Notice of License Copyright: You must update the COPYRIGHT NOTICE portion of this License to include the exact text of the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any Open Game Content You are copying, modifying or distributing, and You must add the title, the copyright date, and the copyright holder's name to the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any Open Game Content by the Contributor.

7. Use of Product Identity: You agree not to Use any Product Identity, including as an indication as to compatibility, except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of each element of that Product Identity. You agree not to indicate compatibility or coadaptability with any Trademark or Registered Trademark in conjunction with a work containing Open Game Content except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of such Trademark or Registered Trademark. The use of any Product Identity in Open Game Content does not constitute a challenge to the ownership of that Product Identity. The owner of any Product Identity used in Open Game Content shall retain all rights, title and interest in and to that Product Identity.

8. Identification: If you distribute Open Game Content You must clearly indicate which portions of the work you are distributing are Open Game Content.

9. Updating the License: Wizards or its designated Agents may publish updated versions of this License. You may use any authorized version of this License to copy, modify and distribute any Open Game Content originally distributed under any version of this License.

10 Copy of this License: You MUST include a copy of this License with every copy of the Open Game Content You Distribute.

11. Use of Contributor Credits: You may not market or advertise the Open Game Content using the name of any Contributor unless You have written permission from the Contributor to do so.

12 Inability to Comply: If it is impossible for You to comply with any of the terms of this License with respect to some or all of the Open Game Content due to statute, judicial order, or governmental regulation then You may not Use any Open Game Material so affected.

13 Termination: This License will terminate automatically if You fail to comply with all terms herein and fail to cure such breach within 30 days of becoming aware of the breach. All sublicenses shall survive the termination of this License.

14 Reformation: If any provision of this License is held to be unenforceable, such provision shall be reformed only to the extent necessary to make it enforceable.

15 COPYRIGHT NOTICE

Open Game License v 1.0 Copyright 2000, Wizards of the Coast, Inc. Copyright 2006, Athas.org