



THE
Explorer's Guide
TO CREATION



SPONSORED BY THE SHARD MARKET



LEAD DESIGNERS: Caspian "Ruse" Ayala
David "DS" Coburn
Thomas Dempsey
John Faugno
Tyler Russell

EDITORS: John Faugno
Lizzy Myers
Tyler Russell

LAYOUT: Caspian "Ruse" Ayala

ARTWORK: Caspian "Ruse" Ayala

SPECIAL THANKS: Lizzy Myers

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THE EXPLORER'S GUIDE TO CREATION

Welcome to your world. It's a lot bigger than you thought
it was.

Travel Guide of
E.A.W. THATCHER

With Commentary by
Haymish Aadson, Desmond J Cortez, Heironymous
Locke, Prof. Maximilian Riversworth

Radiance and Tin El'Shin excerpts provided by the Order
of the Parchment and the House of Tavertin

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WELCOME

That you are even reading this is a testament to the persistence of The Gifted and the success of our new civilizations. The last few millennia have not been kind to us, and that we were able to survive at all is somewhat of a miracle. There are stories from the world before of vast flying machines and people traveling to the stars in the sky, of cities containing millions of people, and of strange metal boxes you could talk to and would help you solve problems in your daily life. Honestly, we don't know what was fantasy and what was reality. We know there were civilizations before now – we can see the ruins of them all over the place – but we don't know how many, or how long each lasted, or what happened to them. We know the world used to be a lot different, but now you never know what's waiting over the horizon.

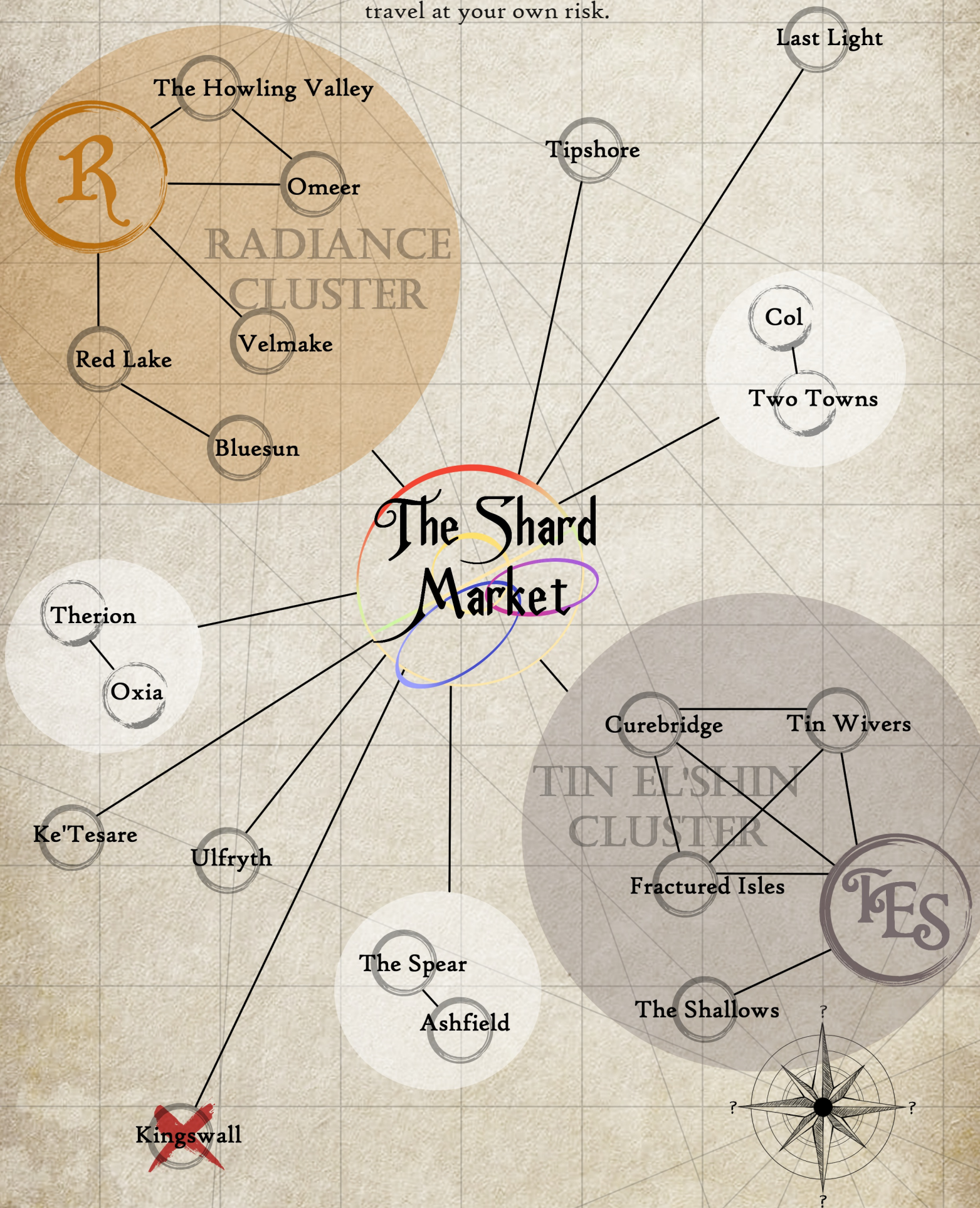
It seems when you rip enough holes in reality, eventually reality rips back.

No one knows what the world looks like, but this travel guide is going to try to answer as many questions as possible. By stepping through the Circles we can travel from place to place, finding small towns, scattered huts, or even massive cities. As more brave explorers take the risk of going through a Circle to see what's on the other side, we get more and more information, which I am hoping to collect in one place for all to see.

Within these pages you will find a town where a slice of summer rotates around a circle in the harshest winter clime. You will find a place where it rains blood, where a spire of ice rises from the desert to provide drinking water to the people who live around it, and a village buried in a jungle so deep, they cannot see the sun. I have spoken with Fire Elves and Dream-born, Deepshadow Orcs and Blood Dwarves. I have sat in on the high council meeting of Radiance, visited the falls of Tin El'Shin, and browsed the stalls of the Shard Market.

Welcome to your world. It's a lot bigger than you thought it was.

For visual clarity this is only an approximation of general Circle travel, and not an accurate Circle path guide. Please consult Circle travel experts, or travel at your own risk.



CREATION

It is so...

Always and forever they dwell together. The two beings, as close as siblings, yet as far apart as enemies.

These are The Maker, and The Unmaker.

When the time of Formation came, The Maker created the Multiverse.

To guide this new place The Maker created Solaron, the god of Order, and Faya, goddess of Healing and Mercy.

Seeing this, The Unmaker grew angry, and spewed forth the Great Ball of Oblivion, which laid waste to half of all that The Maker had created. Left in its wake was naught but a blasted Void. It is from within this Void that Grumach, the god of Rot and Decay, was formed.

The Maker saw all this, but took not umbrage. Instead, The Maker busied with the Formation of our beloved Earth. It set about the creation of a being who would be all things to and of the Earth.

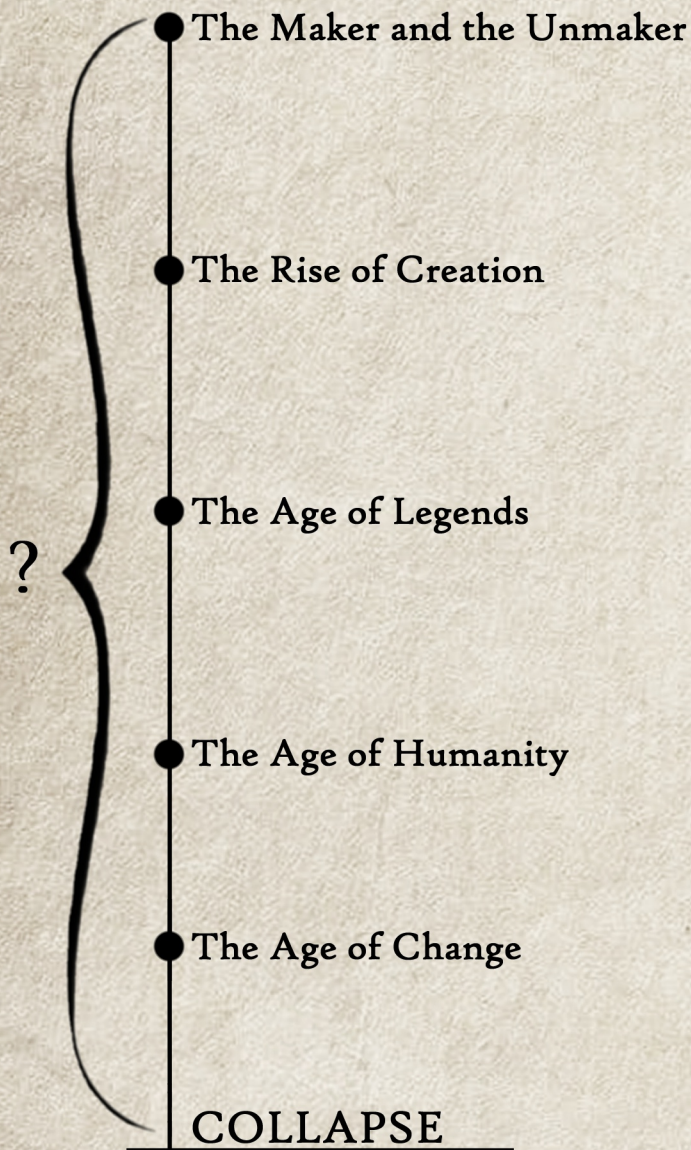
Yet, as it was forming this Earth Being, The Unmaker thrust a portion of its own essence deep within, causing the Earth Being to writhe in conflict and turmoil. It was this Earth Being that wrought our world, and being wearied from its task, laid down to rest. When it awoke from its troubled sleep, it found itself split in twain - not one, but two. The two were Triquill and Harvester, each of the earth, but locked in eternal conflict, one with the other.

The Maker saw that its new children did wearily struggle and toil on this primal world. Pity The Maker felt, and it created Brashtamere, the god of Freedom and Mirth to ease the trouble of sentient spirits. Not to be outdone, The Unmaker formed Artifice, the god of Thieves, to take that in which creatures found pleasure.

The Unmaker was pleased with the struggles of the world, but saw that the mortals must slaughter each other in greater numbers if total destruction was to be fulfilled. Thus, was created Bellingier, the god of War, to spread strife and perpetuate conflict. With his creation, there came to pass the Great War, which raged for many generations.

Great was the destruction of The Maker's creatures. The Maker, hearing the anguished cries, created Jaad, the god of Peace and Wisdom, to end the Great War. Mortals survived. The Maker's creatures struggle even unto today, to find the One Truth of the Multiverse and rejoice in the Maker's Plan.

Such is the origin of the world as it is carved into the monument at Kingswall. The origins of both the Divine and the Profane. Yet our world is more changeable than stone. Harvester and Triquill joined as the Wylds in ages long past memory. Zahar was raised to godhood through Corruption. The Maker and Unmaker departed this shard to wage their eternal war elsewhere. And Elya, by the very will and sacrifice of the faithful, was made to shepherd the Gifted, in this life and the next. Even in this age the Maker's Plan continues to unfold.



OOQ:

Returning players may notice some things missing. A great deal of knowledge has been lost, and everything before the founding of modern civs should be treated with the same certainty that we treat ancient mythology. Some important highlights to keep in mind...

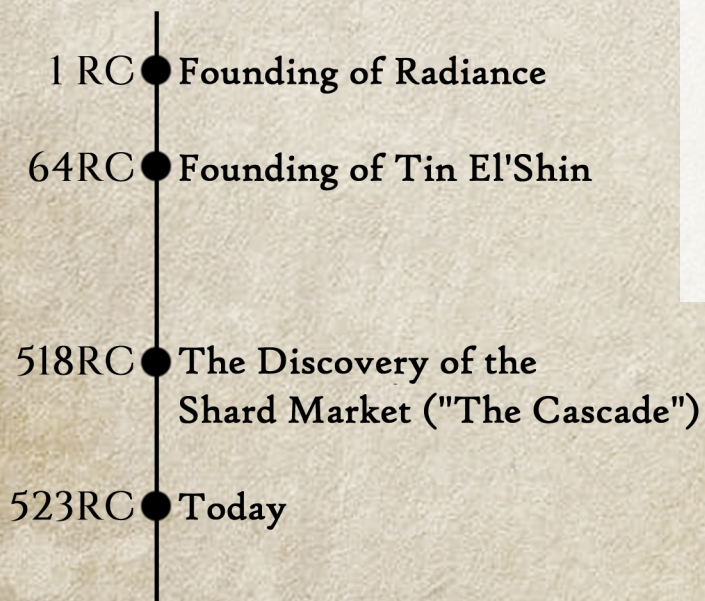
Argon: Does not appear in this record. Tales of the Gifted turned god have been swept from the world.

The Age of Humanity (Formerly the Age of Argon): A period in time when all Gifted were human. Anyone looking around today can tell that this is nonsense, clearly a symbolic story for the Gifted coming into their own.

The Age of Change: Noted as a time of fluctuations in the magics of the world. The time of Elya's ascension and the beginnings of the Collapse.

The Collapse: A period of great upheaval across the world. Civilizations rose and fell. The landscape shifted and sundered. Our shattered world was wrought from the ashes of uncounted catastrophes. No one knows for how long the cycle of destruction and renewal unfolded before the relative calm that has given rise to the peoples of today.

Missives: Instant ritual communication no longer exists. With the current state of Creation, the ability to send a message instantly across the world is a distant legend and a hopeful dream.



A Note From The Travel Guide

Our world is scattered. Separated by mountains and miles, seas and scourges. To travel by any way other than a Circle is to risk eternal Loss. It is anyone's guess how far Radiance sits from Tin El'Shin. Ten days walk or ten thousand, we may never know.

Legends say that all compasses once pointed the same direction, guided by an unseen truth. Now they drift and dance, as predictable as the stars swaying above. That unseen truth, if it ever existed, guides us no longer.

I have seen the fragments of our shattered world, breathed them in, lived their wonders. I hope in these pages you will glean even a fraction of their beauty. If these words can do them justice.

Not every waystop, farmstead, and outlying town is here recorded, not every secret and tradition. I am certain each of these places has a thousand words about themselves for every one I have written.

Do not let these words be all the world to you. Step through the Circles. See them yourself. Fill every inch of these pages with what you find.

E.A.H. Thatcher



RADIANCE

The following is an excerpt from "Collected History of Civilization, Volume III", as provided by the Order of the Parchment, to provide details on the civ of Radiance in lieu of a travel log entry:

Radiance, the City of Light, was originally little more than a monument and a destination for pilgrims.

Over five centuries ago, a great victory over the forces of darkness was celebrated on the site, and statues of the champions were erected and holy ground consecrated in their honor. The heroes were then buried here at the end of their lives, and a monastic order dedicated themselves to the preservation and upkeep of the tombs and surrounding grounds.

The monument, known as The Garden of the Victorious, became a place to honor not only these heroes, but anyone who lost their lives in the battle against evil. Inns cropped up to house the pilgrims, then trading posts to sell goods to them, then residences to house those that would live here rather than travel. As time passed, the city of Radiance rose up around the garden, becoming a place where the pursuit of divinity and ultimate victory over the forces of darkness was the highest calling.

As the city expanded, construction began on The Celestial Tower. Built overlooking the Garden of the Victorious, the Tower began as a church dedicated to both Solaron and Faya. As the population grew, so did the tower. Whole floors were added to accommodate the worship of other faiths, and it slowly grew into the marvel of architecture and devotion that it is today. The tower now houses a Temple to each of the divines, all on different floors, which is a feat that is not only thought to be impossible, but has never been replicated, making it the holiest place in the known world. Many Holy Orders call the Tower their home, and it also houses the greatest library of religious texts known to exist. The "Eyes of Jaad" - the massive astrolabe that can be seen for miles - sits atop the tower, and is used for a variety of magical and scientific purposes. It is said the Eyes can detect shifts in planar energy, accurately predict high holy days based on the stars, and even portend events of historical

significance through the use of highly complex divinatory calculations.

In the modern era, Radiance boasts a population of nearly 150,000 individuals, in a vaguely ring-shaped layout surrounding the Garden of the Victorious and The Celestial Tower. The city is broken into districts, each one overseen by a Dean. The districts are further divided into Wards, each one containing consecrated ground, overseen by a Prior. Historically all of these offices required Ascension, but as the city grew this became impossible, and now as long as the person is an Initiate to one of the Divines in good standing, they may hold office.

A ruling council, made up of initiates of the Divines, was put in place. Again, being a council member once required being Ascended, but over time it became a representative appointed by all of the Ascended of that faith within Radiance. There are three seats per church, with six designated for Elya, creating a council of twenty seven members. The seats of Elya are known as "The Seats of the People" and can be held by any citizen of Radiance. Each seat is voted upon by the population of the city every six years, creating an alternating tenure where a new person is elected every year. The other councilors are appointed to eight-year tenures. No one may serve on the Council for two consecutive tenures.

Each facet of society is overseen by two councilors of different religions, and lieutenants and other officers are appointed by the councilors. For example, the City Watch is overseen by one of the councilors of Solaron and one of the councilors of Bellinger, ensuring not only a just and fair organization, but one with excellent martial prowess, while the Guild of Crafters and Artisans is overseen by a councilor of Artifice and a councilor of Brashtamere, upholding standards of aesthetic beauty as well as fair trade. If two councilors disagree, they may appeal to the rest of the council to settle a dispute. The whole council meets twice per month in the Hall of the Conclave, the center of government in the city.

Culture:

The general perception of all citizens of Radiance is that membership in a church is effectively required. While initiation is not mandatory (as korba is expensive, and often out of reach of the average person), holding oneself

to the tenets of a faith, attending services, and observing religious festivals are the norm. Just about every residence or place of business will have holy symbols on display, proclaiming their religious affiliation to anyone who takes note.

The church of Elya makes up over 70% of the population, while the other seven Divines make up the remaining 30%. Given the church of Elya's lack of initiates, this means that those who proclaim faith in Elya are governed by those who follow other gods, which has been a source of some friction in the past. But, as all administrative functions of the entire city are overseen by the Council, these rare instances of religious prejudice are often quashed by those in power to ensure peace and good will among the citizenry.

The city does its best to tend to the needs of all of its people. Items of necessity, such as food and clothing, are paid for and distributed by the Deans, while the sale of luxury items or rare goods are left to the mercantile class. The council collects taxes from the whole of the city (overseen by the councilors of Artifice and Jaad), and the council as a whole ensures the money is put to good use. People are encouraged to follow their passions, and to live a life in service of the Divines.

Those who dedicate their life to the cause of combatting the Profanes are held in highest esteem. Those that leave home for long excursions are granted a "Bonded," an individual initiated in the same church, who will take care of the home and family of the individual while they are on campaign. This is a sacred task given to those faithful who cannot fight themselves, but still seek to aid in the ultimate battle between Light and Darkness.

The people of Radiance have many colloquial phrases that include the names of the Divines, which just shows how omnipresent religion is in daily life. Some common examples include;

When someone sneezes, it is considered polite to say "Jaad bless you."

A celebration that gets particularly wild or raucous is said to be "Blessed by Brashtamere," while the illnesses felt the next morning

are called “Brashtamere’s Curse.”

Someone in a foul mood is said to “have their Bellinger up,” and parents will often tell their children to “keep their Bellinger outside.”

Most weather events have a common name associated with the Wylds. A sun shower is often called “Triquill’s Tears,” and the first snow of the year is said to be “the end of Harvester’s Hunt.”

Common expletives and exclamations include “Faya’s Mercy!”, “Solaron’s Eyes!” and “Jaad’s Whiskers!”

Radiance has sought to expand their influence in the world through the creation of outposts in unsettled and unclaimed territory throughout the world. The network of villages surrounding the city are protected by the members of Radiance’s military, and they have also sponsored the exploration of Circles throughout their sphere of control. As they have done so, the battle against the Profane has increased in both strength and intensity, and it is thanks to the City of Light that the world is safer anywhere their hand touches.



TIN EL'SHIN

The following is an excerpt from “Our Beginnings, Our Story”, as provided by House Tavertin, to provide details on the civ of Tin El'Shin in lieu of a travel log entry:

Whether it was fate, divine intervention, or blind chance that led that lost caravan to the Planar Falls is unknown, but that the Shrine of Hospitality was there, nestled in the green fields surrounded by the prismatic colors of the flowing waters let those poor lost travelers know that this was a place to call home. They ceased their wandering, and broke down their train of wagons and carts to build the first homes and shops, and thus the trading post that will grow to become Tin El'Shin was born.

As more visitors found their way to the small collective, the more they saw the value of this place. There were lush fields to plant crops in, fresh water in abundance, and seemingly endless trees to cut for lumber and stone to quarry for masonry. As the town grew into a city, and greater minds joined the population, they realized that the Planar Falls were not just visually beautiful, but a source of unrefined korba. Over the decades, the masters of magical power came together with metallurgists, smiths, and alchemists to create the first mystic refineries. It was through the development of standardized korba that the town of Tin El'Shin would grow into a vast mercantile empire, with trading posts spread across the land and through dozens of Circles.

Today the city is home to over 120,000 souls, all living together and working for the success and glorification of Tin El'Shin.

The city itself is built upon the hills, cliffs and fields that surround the Planar Falls, the Shrine of Hospitality, a place consecrated in Elya's honor, still remains, untouched, in a small park at the heart of the city, a collection of stones that has been left as it was found centuries ago. The city has expanded in all directions, spreading across the land like growing moss. The longest tendril has reached across the mile the lost caravan trekked, finding the Circle they emerged from and building the Plaza of Welcoming around it. It is through this Circle that people come to our

city, walk the long road of the Golden Way, a straight line all the way to the Shrine of Hospitality. Dozens of avenues and bridges connect to the Golden Way, leading to the many districts that make up the variety and splendor of Tin El"Shin.

The people of Tin El'Shin are ruled by the Collective of Peers. Peers of the First Order, also called Dukes/Duchesses or Prince/Princesses, are powerful and rich enough to control entire districts of the city, belonging to multiple guilds and orders, and able to pay for the protection and care of the people under their rule, Peers of the Second Order, also called Counts/Countesses, control singular guilds, organizations or neighborhoods, while also maintaining membership in those they are allied with, all the way down to Peers of the Ninth Order, who are the lowest rank of noble, take the honorific of Ser, and are usually in control of a single household or manor. The Peers are ruled over by the Justicar, a Peer of the First Order who is chosen through a complicated election process where all Peers of the Fourth Order and above are narrowed down to a limited number of electors and multiple rounds of primary elections, to serve as the final authority. While a Peer of any rank is responsible for the governance of their own land and influence, it is common practice to appeal decisions up to a Peer of a higher order who can overrule them. The Justicar is the final authority, and can only be overruled by five Peers of the First Order, which then triggers an immediate election, which is highly expensive and often takes months to finalize. Thus, overruling the Justicar is only done in the most extreme circumstances.

For the common person, the way their voices are heard is through the dozens of guilds and professional orders that reside within the city. Mastery of a recognized guild or professional order usually comes with a Peerage, so the needs of the guilds cannot be simply ignored by the nobility. It is through the guilds and orders that Tin El'Shin blooms, as the members create all the things the people need to thrive. From bakers to vintners, tanners to weavers, haulers to scribes, everyone earning a living in Tin El'Shin belongs to a guild or professional order. Membership usually requires an apprenticeship, after which full membership can be granted by the ruling Peer.

The daily life of the people is one that reflects two worlds, one of labor, and one of luxury. Because guild membership pays well, it is expected that outside of working hours, people display their wealth via clothes, jewelry, and other finery. It is a common thought that a Peer's influence is reflected in the appearance of those in their employ, so it is encouraged to look your best as often as possible, especially since the volume of travelers from outside of the city has increased over the last decades. The visitors to the city see the city and all of its splendor reflected in the appearance of even its lowest citizens, and understand that Tin El'Shin is truly the center of the civilized world.

The Collective of Peers have been undertaking a campaign of expansion, looking for other civilizations to trade with, or unsettled places to build an outpost, to establish new streams of resources and revenue to keep up with the ever-increasing demands of the city's guilds and citizens. The trade of korba has always been the true lifeblood of the city, and that the standard units of korba of all colors have been found in settlements across the world.

The Shard Market

I've always fancied myself a cultured individual. Worldly. Cosmopolitan even. The first time I saw the Shard Market I realized just how large our world might actually be. Paths jammed with people of every shape and size, every influence and lineage. A joyful din of multicolored confusion.

The scene I'm describing, and that you likely picture when you hear the name, is of course the central market itself. A great span of stone dotted grasslands has been covered over with colored tents and pop-up carts and ramshackle stalls. Voices call from within in every accent, boasting goods from all corners, pointing at brightly painted signs. Many are merchants who make their living passing between established Circles, trading back and forth. Some sell their own goods, fruits of their fields and forges, packs bursting with trinkets and textiles.

Despite the neverending throngs of people traipsing about, the Shard Market's permanent population is only a few dozen. Shoppers and shopkeepers alike are largely transient, not by choice but by design. The ever shifting market town is governed foremost by its discoverers, the Crimson Mane adventuring party. Their guiding principle has been to maintain the market's neutrality, and one facet of that is to stop any permanent population from establishing. A shifting system of short term leases, building prohibitions, lots by bid or lottery and so on keep anyone's roots from getting too deep. For example, I make a point of stopping in on friends at *Bessy, Bobby, and Billy's* and *Thunderscale Armory* during every visit. Sometimes they are on the same row, sometimes a half mile apart. The shifting landscape is confusing and inconvenient, but the near infinite supply of customers more than makes up for the difficulty.

Yet, not keeping everything you love and cherish in the world in the Shard Market may in fact be a very prudent move. The very thing that makes the location so advantageous also makes it hazardous. I am speaking, of course, of the Circles. Most known civilizations have a single Circle in their vicinity, maybe two. A fair distance seems to be spanned between them and typically one would collide with impassable barriers, be

they of land, beast, or magic, long before they run into another Circle. The Shard Market, in contrast, is surrounded by dozens. They stand at random intervals, scattered across the landscape with little rhyme or reason. Gateways to untold wonder.

Untold is the most important part at the moment. Activating any Circle is a gamble. Will it open immediately or not for years to come? Will it stay open for a moment or several days? Will the other side be a field of grain, a city of Zaharians, or the bottom of the ocean? The exploration of the Shard Market's Circles is purposefully slow and methodical, but all those who make their living there are keenly aware of the dangers that could come crashing down at any moment.

Yet it is the opening of Circles that birthed the Shard Market to begin with. Crimson Mane, according to their account, made to open a single Circle as normal. But when the activation commenced, a web of light shot out across the plane. Circles glowed from beneath the long grass, two, then three, then more. The Cascade connected the great cities of Tin El'Shin and Radiance for the first time. Linked Tipshore and The Spear and others to the outside world for the first time. In an instant that lonely plane became the most important patch of land in our whole shattered world.

ASHFIELD

If you are the worldly sort of traveler that keeps an open mind and your best foot forward, you will bear witness to many of the breath-taking places Creation has to offer. If you can set aside shock and bewilderment when confronted by a people thriving in exhausting hostility, you can see the real fighting spirit of the Gifted shining through. They are an ember burning brightly in a puddle of ash.

Ashfield is just such a place. The town itself is small, surrounded by a vast forest on rolling hills. It might resemble an illustration from a children's tale, if not for the dull ash and glowing embers descending in an endless cloud from the sky. Residents here spend most of the year employed as loggers, hauling great trees from the forest to the mill, or taking their turn on the Firewatch, unceasing patrols to ensure that the winds don't spark any small embers into a big problem. That effort alone in a place like this is heroic and the threat is eternal.

Or...almost eternal. For about one week out of the year, the Ashfielders are granted a respite from the rain of flaming hazards and receive instead a rain of actual rain. This week is known as the Grey Mire, for reasons that become obvious as you stand knee-deep in the muck formed when a year's worth of ash-fall mixes and mushes into an impenetrable sludge. While this would be a quite reasonably devastating turn of events to less-hardy folk, the Ashfielders spend this week alternating between muckraking and jubilant celebration. It is the only time of year when the entire population is in town at once. With no fires to put out and all logging operations on hold until the mud has dried down, residents are free to partake in food, drinks, games, and song in the community hall, in between shifts of shoveling muck into holding pits at the edge of town. It is backbreaking work but when the rains cease and the ember-fall returns, the mud dries down into hard sheets that can be broken up and sold as some very nutritious fertilizer.

This explains why they all have fireproof clothing and carry wool blankets as part of their standard kit.

The people of Ashfield are strong, stubborn, innovative, and fiercely proud of their community. Children are well-educated, both from the shrine to Jaad that doubles as the town library (their materials are, wisely,

written on non-flammable vellum), and in the ways of fire management. One might think that living in such a dangerous place would make them dour and over-serious, but the people are able to maintain a positive outlook despite their constant need for vigilance.

An inebriated elderly local admitted that in the town's history, it has succumbed to fires not once, not twice, but thrice. They learned their lesson, though. This time they rebuilt everything from brick..

The greatest threat to safety here is wildfire and children are taught to stamp fires out from the time they can manage walking. They are encouraged to wander the forest in groups in between school lessons to practice fire-dampening skills and teamwork, knowing that someday it will be their turn to keep the town from succumbing to the flame. Because of this, many of their common turns of phrase have to do with fire. Calling someone a "firebrand" or "fiery" means they're suspicious or a threat rather than the more common interpretation, and any proclamation about coming rain or bad weather is a message of hope. "Looks like rain," is usually said with a smile, meaning that better times are just ahead if you have the patience to wait for them to arrive.

Ashfielders that travel to other civs will often stand out in the rain, face upturned, with a smile on their face. They think the frequency of rain in other places is a good omen, and a blessing of prosperity from the Divines.

I would call it a miracle that Ashfield is still standing despite its many years of lost buildings and lives. But the real miracle is the townsfolk who have devoted their lives and Gifts to ensuring that such accidents will not happen again, against some truly astonishing odds.

Notes:
Common influences: Nature, Shadow, Elemental: Fire

BLUESUN

On paper, Bluesun sounds like a perfect place to live. A bustling city near the water, plentiful tasty sealife, a low crime rate, and a thriving economy based on korba-mining and the production of clay and glassware. But the ideal is somewhat spoiled if you, like myself, enjoy ever seeing the sky. Bluesun is entirely contained within a massive dome of air beneath the ocean's surface.

What you see here is exactly what you get. The people of Bluesun, like the dome that surrounds them, value strength, practicality, and bluntness, and have little time for illusion and trickery. Their clothes tend to be drapery and loose-fitting, and often with open-toed shoes, in deference to the warm, humid climate of the dome. When they wear armor it is stylized and decorated to mimic the shapes and patterns of local creatures, if it is not crafted from their scales and carapace. Trophies in the form of glass beads, shells, or odd ancient treasures are popular decorations for the body to wordlessly express pride in deeds done. They are passionately dedicated to the values of Bellinger even if they do not worship her specifically, from the highest members of society to the poorest. Bluesun's monarchs, the Glasshelm family, have held power for generations, in a rather literal sense. The throne is not inherited by the eldest, but by those deemed by priests of Bellinger to possess the most strength and magical prowess.

You may be wondering how such loud, passionate people stave off boredom and relieve their daily stresses without the bar brawls, petty theft, or childish pranks that many city-dwellers might resort to elsewhere. I posed that very question to a grizzled tavern keeper, who grinned broadly and hiked up the hem of their chiton to show me a frankly impressive scar, resembling a large bite mark, that mottled most of their thigh. Eyes twinkling, they clapped their hands on my shoulder. "Just wait until it rains - it is awe-making."

Being an underwater city safely contained in a bubble, Bluesun does not have "rain" the way a surface city might. In the exact center of the city and at its highest point, directly beneath the pinnacle of the dome, is the Arena. When a resident refers to rain, they are almost explicitly referring

"The body is a vessel, and the larger the vessel the more power it can hold - so the Glasshelm family are... very athletic."

Vessel is *ONLY* used to refer to the body, no other container. Made that mistake only once.

"Feeling-making" is the most notable common phrase in this civ! It is both abrupt and convenient to have such direct statements as "This is happy-making." This is anger-making.

to the phenomenon in which a monster of some variety has fallen through the dome and landed within the boundaries of the Arena. No one knows if the Arena was built first and its location is a Divine Act, or if it “rained” first and the Arena was built in response to contain the threats. Priests of Bellinger characteristically find themselves butting heads about whether Bellinger blessed them with the knowledge to build the Arena perfectly for sport, or if her faithful made the choice to build it as a gift of devotion to display their finest fighters in sport. Bellinger is the only one who may know the truth of the matter and she is not about to clear up that conflict with the grace of a clarification.

Entertainment comes in the form of performative combat. Tournaments are regularly hosted for people to show off their strengths - either against another citizen or against various creatures and monsters pulled in from the depths for sport. Battle Mage is the crowd favorite, and any with a knack for the game will hone their skill to combine magic and physical abilities. It is almost an unspoken rite of passage into adulthood to dive into the water, find a creature, and slay it for a trophy. Any conflict between residents that is too inflammatory to settle in civil discussion will invariably be resolved here. At the end of a busy night in the Arena the blood spattered and pooled in the sand glows almost purple in the blue-filtered light from above. The people of Bluesun find their way to sleep happy, sated, and ready for whatever comes their way next.

Notes:

Common influences: Elemental: Air, Elemental: Water, Light

COL, "THE CITY OF HEROES"

Col is a rambling, tropical city that has built up rapidly around their central feature: a looming megalith, also named Col, coated with vine growth and shrouded in mystery. Why is it here? Where did it come from? Why is it seemingly filled to bursting with monsters and treasure? This city and its people live and die by the stories that emerge from the depths.

Two types of people call the city of Col home: Delvers, and the merchants and bards who keep the city fed, armored, and happy. Delvers are those who make regular trips into Col in search of fame and fortune. If you go in deep enough, you may make it to a chamber that hasn't yet been explored. You might even emerge with some coin or an ancient relic, which by local custom, is yours to keep. The possibility of claiming fame and fortune at the end of a blade is a siren song to those desperate to make a name for themselves. The discovery of the Shard Market has resulted in a boom for the local economy, which is now struggling to provide adequate housing for the number of people ready to perform acts of heroism. The city that has grown up fast to provide for the native Delvers is an ever-expanding hodgepodge of taverns, smithies, casinos, and other services to support the seasonal, but increasing, population of wannabe adventurers.

Merchants and bards make it three types of people. Should be -- Delvers and Not Delvers

The relationship between these groups is symbiotic. The town would be quickly overrun by the monsters residing in the megalith if not for the regular churn of heroes keeping them at bay. Likewise, the heroes could not survive without a dedicated army committed to feeding them, patching their wounds, and mending their weapons and armor. The survival of the city depends on maintaining the status quo. The absence of a formal system of government and a codified set of rules often results in lawlessness, though historically Col has survived by adequately self-regulating. Bandits and thieves guilds who try to lay claim to districts in the city of Col find themselves quickly rooted out by surprisingly efficient and ruthless groups of vigilantes, or by Col's Soldiers, the official town guard composed largely of retired adventurers.

Col has a shrine dedicated to Artifice, and fittingly, the town's unofficial motto is "To the victor goes the spoils." The most talented adventure-seekers are rewarded with riches, relics, and the most stunning ancient pieces of armor and weaponry pulled from the depths. The only thing that matters more than the material value of these items is the stories of how the item came to be on the surface. It is tradition that, by uncovering and wielding such relics, an adventurer is the keeper of that story and they will be called upon to tell it often. It is also tradition for those that take the challenge to tattoo their bodies with the tales of their exploits. The deeper one goes, the more tattoos they adorn themselves with. It is common to tattoo over the wounds you received during the trials, as well as to have likenesses of your vanquished foes covering your body. Stories of exploits are abundant in the town and usually are retold many times, even after the hero's death. It is considered dishonorable to embellish on the story, so a culture has developed around accurate dissemination of information. Stories are frequently memorialized in song or poem, as these mediums tend to survive longer without significant alterations to the historical events. What better advertising could there be?

The people of Col value bravery, boldness, tact, and honesty. It is easy to enter the depths of Col, it is hard to come back up with something to show for it. There is no honor in dying for the cause. You aren't anyone in this city until you've emerged and told the tale of your trials.

Apparently it's very common in Col to walk up to strangers and ask about the legacy of one's trinkets, and how they were earned. Some locals get quite irate if you don't have a good story to tell.

The competition between tattoo artists is fierce, with the most skilled booked out for months in advance as they ply their trade. The most popular artists are richer than the adventurers who pay for their services.

Notes:

Common influences: Chaos, Elemental: Earth, Creation

CUREBRIDGE

The last thing one might expect to see when stepping through a Circle with the intention of some quality time in the beauty of a natural forest is... metal. Metal coating the forest floor. Metal splashed up the bottoms of tree trunks. Bizarre trees crafted from metal, unusually straight and thin, their branches extending from the trunk in a way that is a little too perfectly perpendicular. Do not panic! You did not get lost in a far away place never to be heard from again. To understand and appreciate this astonishing place, simply look up.

Curebridge is a testament to the wonders of modern engineering. A city, beautifully and thoughtfully rendered from metal of the highest quality, suspended from the canopy of a lush, dense forest. Some of the trees, as noted above, are intriguing metallic creations said to be remnants of the legendary Age of Humanity. It certainly makes for a striking image when the sun dapples through the leaves. Structures and buildings seem to organically sprout from the boughs, held aloft by the lattice of branches below and above such that you feel no swaying in even the highest winds.

The suspension bridges laced throughout are accompanied by a particularly interesting feature: carriages, hung on wires, that are propelled by magic to carry passengers and cargo wherever they wish to go. I have never seen the like. These structures are all crafted with metal, from sturdy steel planking to delicate copper decorations winding around the carriages.

Be sure to tip your carriage operator!

Curebridge is not suspended in the boughs to keep themselves out of danger from the monsters that stalk the woods (in fact, those are not the most dangerous things in the forest), but to keep themselves safe from the Flood - a phenomenon where liquid metal overflows the forest floor. Iron, copper, precious silver and gold and, on rare occasions, liquid starmetal - all flow through the forest floor in turn. This odd and unpredictable event provides the materials the engineers and artisans of Curebridge require to ply their trades. The people here use metal in all of their similes, saying something is "as strong as steel" or "as soft as lead" or "as beautiful as gold." Comparisons to metal, and other metal-isms adorn their language

"I'm feeling rusty" is a much more negative sentiment than I was prepared for. Try to avoid this phrase.

as readily as actual metal adorns their clothing.

The centermost spire supports the Artisan Guild Hall, and it is through the guilds that the city is managed. Metallurgical skill is the most prized trait here and blood-ties are not nearly as valued as the relationship a citizen has with their guild. Training for tradework starts young. After several years of instruction and practice among the different disciplines, the Curebridge coming-of-age ceremony is a demonstration of skill in the Artisan Guild Hall to display their aptitude for their preferred craft. Those who pass are accepted as apprentices in the relevant guild, granted a new surname based on their craft, and will be raised in the Upper Boughs. Residents of the Upper Boughs spend their lives perfecting their trades and will decorate themselves in the same way they lovingly decorate their city. Elaborate jewelry, metal integrated into clothing in the form of bands and plates, rings and delicate crowns strung through hair - the more intricate and finely-crafted, the higher the person's standing in the Upper Boughs.

Passing and becoming an apprentice is beyond joining a guild - for most, it is joining a new family.

There is a noticeable lack of gems or jewels, seen as gaudy - it's all about the metal.

Those who are unsuccessful in their test of skill are remanded to the care of the Lower Boughs. The residents here are generally employed in one of two professions: Collectors and the Watch Guard. Collectors have the dangerous task of rappelling to the forest floor during the intermittent Floods, collecting the precious liquid metal and carrying it back up to the city to be rendered by the Upper Boughs. They are also responsible for the more mundane tasks of hunting and gathering sustenance from the bountiful forest when the Flood eventually recedes. If a person is successful in their time with the Collectors and can avoid the pitfalls of getting mauled by local fauna or being encased with liquid metal during an unexpected Flood while below, they can aspire to join the more prestigious guild of the Watch Guard.

Not to mention, it would be quite difficult to mine into the earth to find them.

This guild is devoted to protecting Curebridge from "fliers and climbers," catch-all titles for various predators that attempt to hunt in the city. I have been assured by one of the Watch Guard that while fliers and climbers are both "generally nasty," they "all die the same and it's nothing we can't handle." The Lower Boughs folk are also visually identifiable with metal worked into their daily garb, but in a more practical way than

their Upper Boughs counterparts. Collectors are always dressed for a Drop, sporting leather gloves, elbow and knee pads, overalls, and other protective gear. Their metal comes in the form of reinforcement for much-abused garments or armor-plating for safety.

Notes:

Common influences: Creation, Elemental: Earth

Even as the Creation-born, without influence, are the most common folk of many civs it is moreso noticeable in Curebridge.

THE FRACTURED ISLE

The discovery of the Shard Market, it goes almost without saying, is one of the biggest cultural developments of our modern age. The Gifted of Creation have always been tough and ambitious but having that life-changing access to connection and communication has truly made us shine. This is especially true for the people of the Fractured Isle, whose main source of industry seems to be throwing a rude gesture at Death.

The Fractured Isle is a large plateau in the ocean, surrounded by thousands of broken, smaller plateaus, dramatically forced apart during some ancient cataclysmic event. The majority of people live on the largest plateau, though there are smaller communities scattered on other, smaller islands. Bridges have been established between most of the inhabited fractures, and where there are not, people traverse the plateaus by pole-vaulting across or, when the winds prevail, gliding across on homemade kites. There is a landmass in the distance that spans nearly the whole horizon, but has never been successfully accessed. All attempts to reach the far shore have presumably met with disaster which must be endlessly frustrating for a people so full of curiosity and adventurous spirit. It has become a common phrase to say something is “on the horizon” to mean anything that’s a goal, desire, or wistful fantasy. Conversely, anything that is dangerous, foreboding or ominous is said to be “underfoot” or “down below,” indicative of the unforgiving ocean that surges beneath them.

Or multiple events, who knows?

Saying you “look down” on someone can mean you view them as a threat, which may or may not be disrespectful depending on the context.

Cliff Running is the practice here that drives most of their economy. Pairs of treasure seekers connect themselves together by lengths of strong rope. While one is lowered over the edge of the plateau cliff, the other braces and supports their weight and keeps them from falling hundreds of feet into the churning sea below. With sufficient practice the pair are able to walk around the island, one safely on top of the cliff and one protruding from the face. In this manner, the dangling partner is able to chisel out and collect precious gemstones from between the plateau fractures. The masters of this craft can collect dozens of gems at a time without the dangling partner needing to be pulled back up to the surface. This craft is highly respectable in the Fractured Isles and the pairs of Cliff Runners are

Citizens of the Fractured Isle have struggled with adopting the metallic currency standard. They are accustomed to trading in gems, as their island is metal poor. The Islanders are just as likely to melt coins down for industry as they are to invest them back in the economy.

very tightly bonded as their lives, and livelihood, depends on such extreme trust. This bond is just as strong in the tavern and on the battlefield as it is on the cliffs of their home.

Those who aren't Cliff Runners live in a manner that would be familiar to any pastoral civ, growing farms, tending livestock or working a trade, but even the simplest farmer will have a jeweled brooch or earring to accent their daily attire.

The gemstones collected by the Cliff Runners are very popular at the Shard Market and that trade has greatly enhanced the quality of life on the Fractured Isles. They dress in practical but breezy garments in colors that reflect the gem tones, both as an expression of fondness and also because the rich colors make them easier to spot on the cliffs. The island has a shrine of Jaad that has been lovingly built up with the influx of coin. Which better god for a people who prize discovery and challenge above all else?

Notes:

Common influences: Elemental: Water, Elemental: Air, Dream

THE HOWLING VALLEY

Culture and society could not exist without the cooperation and unity of every member working together to maintain it, and in no society is the reliance on harmony more prevalent (or literal) than in the Howling Valley. A small town located in a verdant green valley and surrounded by snow-peaked mountains, it enjoys the rather temperate climate of the lowlands, but the area is constantly beset by the winds providing the Howling Valley its monniker. In the mountains to the North, East, and South, there are cavernous openings. A unique tone is emitted from each opening as the winds are forced through the channels of rock. E Flat to the North, A Flat to the South, and B Flat to the East. Together, they produce a perfect E Flat Suspended chord, which echoes at all times through the valley, reminiscent of a pipe organ, sometimes distant, sometimes overwhelming. Residents revere the wind, tones, and 'mouths' from which they originate, locally referred to as Elycein, Akscia, and Biwynn, collectively referred to as "the Trio."

The gorgeous landscape views and constant thrum of music on the wind have inspired a civilization of artists and musicians, and many seeking artistic inspiration will travel here on sabbatical, or on pilgrimage to relieve an artist block with a change in scenery and fresh air. Traditional dress is very practical, but often adorned with artistic flairs and hidden pockets and pouches to contain the tools and materials of their artistic trade, just in case the inspiration to Make strikes away from their studios and workshops. Since the explosion of tourism introduced with the connection to the Shard Market, fashions have become more flamboyant to highlight the unique artistic natures of the valley residents. Colorful flowers reminiscent of the rolling hills in springtime, flowy draped fabrics designed to catch in the wind, and the lush colors of well-tended fields are popular additions incorporated into more traditional garb. Likewise, artists and musicians will always bring the valley with them when they travel away. All music written here traditionally ends on an E Flat Suspended chord to provide the Trio a chance to finish the piece with them.

The town is ruled by a trio of equal but distinct voices, collectively called the Lesser Trio, or simply the Lessers. Each voice in The Lessers

When asked if anyone has explored the caves from which the sounds emerge, locals grimace and turn away. To most, the voices of The Trio are sacred, but not all. Apparently at least one brave explorer has attempted to spelunk inside Biwynn, despite the deafening sound it produced. They havent been seen since.

It's amazing how quickly one can acclimate to the ever-present drone of The Trio. When I left the Howling Valley through the Circle, the silence I was thrust into was numbing. It's like I left a part of myself in the valley.

represents a portion of the town's main interests - Economics, the Arts, and Defense. No decision is made without complete harmony, which does regrettably mean that progress and decision-making tends to stagnate on issues of concern that impact one faction of society more than the others. Historically, the Lessers have always sung in unison during times of crisis, but the connection to the Shard Market has added a fourth note that is discordant at times. This aspect of harmony in triplicate extends to the rest of the town as well. When two people are in conflict, it is expected that a neutral third party will make an effort to resolve the issue. It is taboo at worst, and superstitious bad luck at best, to refuse a genuine offer of aid from this third.

The town's social center is a shrine to Brashtamere. Impromptu concerts and art displays can be frequently found decorating the air and the walls of the structure, which is maintained by a somewhat mysterious sect called the Order of the Discordant Resolve. The order provides for the spiritual well-being of the town and supervises the offerings left for Brashtamere. They are also the keepers of an ancient, if rather melodramatic, prophecy. It is said that Akscia, the voice of the Trio producing the A Flat, will change tones when some world-altering event occurs. The new tone will predict the Gifted's role in the coming conflict. The Discordant Resolve claims such events have happened in the past, but no records exist of such an event, nor is it in the memory of anyone living.

Even in casual conversation, the frequency in which people broke out into song was astounding. Every new greeting was a melody!

Notes:

Common influences: Elemental: Air, Light, Nature

KE'TESARE

My first thought upon entering Ke'Tesare was "How quaint." After traveling through a complex series of seemingly obscure, uninhabited areas with Circles that led to other obscure, uninhabited areas, I finally arrived at a small village in a green valley, home to only a few dozen people. Nice grazing land for sheep and cows. Small fields and gardens alongside every home. I didn't see the narrow pathway that led up the mountain, or the small roadside shrine to Jaad at the bottom.

Ke'Tesare is not the village, but a remote monastery high above on the icy peak. The path up is treacherous and hard to navigate, marked with brightly colored flags every few hundred yards. Upon reaching the top, a traveler is met with a truly awe-inspiring sight - a statue of a dragon, rearing back as if it's about to breathe fire down the path, standing fifty feet tall, the stone covered in a layer of glittering ice. Behind it, a stone tower stands, nearly featureless save for a single orange and yellow door, the paint faded from centuries of exposure. I was permitted to enter the antechamber of the tower to get warm, but could progress no further. A lone initiate explained where I was.

The "quaint" village has swelled somewhat in the last years with dragon-fascinated would-be-warriors and scholars turned away at the tower door.

This is the home of the Dragon Warriors, an order of warrior-monks that are dedicated to the service of Jaad and the mastery of draconic fire through focus, discipline, and months, if not years of dedication. It is said that in ancient times, a pact was forged between the greatest of dragons and Jaad, allowing the dragons to be saved from eradication, but their power and greed would be tempered by wisdom and forethought. Thus the dragon warriors were born.

According to legend, there were twenty-six dragons at the dawn of creation. Ages of conflict and warfare reduced them to near-extinction, but their sole surviving member saved them at the brink of ruin. The dragon warriors now seek any information they can about the fabled twenty-six, hoping to restore them to their full potential. It is unknown how many dragons have been actually returned to life, but Ke'Tesare serves as the headquarters for that mission, and the greatest repository of draconic lore and legend in the known world.

They talk with a lot of confidence about dragons and such, but it didn't sound any more authentic than any other nursery tale.

Aspiring dragon warriors come to Ke'Tesare from all over the world, hoping to gain acceptance in the order after being guided here by a dream or vision, which is supposedly divinely inspired. The trek up the mountain is the final step of the pilgrimage. The three ascended that serve as the heads of the order will then judge the aspirant, and will either permit them to remain in the monastery, or send them back down to the village after a brief rest.

While the Order is ultimately in service to Jaad and the mission of gathering information about the twenty-six, Dragon warriors may be of any lineage or planar influence, any walk of life or social class, and follow any god (though the majority are devoted to Jaad), as long as they possess the wisdom, devotion, understanding, and patience to master the arts taught within. Those who complete the mastery of the arts are marked with one of the sigils of the twenty-six, and supposedly have access to even greater power, but I could not confirm this in any concrete way.

I walked back down to the village - the journey far easier than climbing up - was treated to a bowl of mutton stew at the village pub, and returned home with a new respect for those wandering truth-seekers and warriors trained at Ke'Tesare.

Didn't see a single dragon, 0/10

*Notes:
Common influences: Elemental: Fire, Light*

KINGSWALL

Population, none. Industry, none. Infrastructure, ruins. Or maybe “ruin” is more accurate.

Stepping through the Kingswall Circle was an eerie experience. Rubble strewn ground extends a stone's throw from the Circle before falling precipitously down into a gorge of unfathomable depth. No other side looms on the horizon, only further listless emptiness devolving into haze and shadows.

One structure breaks the expanse. A single wall, towering granite and marble, unblemished by time, graven with import. The namesake of Kingswall is a massive carved relief depicting the original catechism, the story of how the Maker made the world, how it was defiled by the Unmaker, how they made the first gods in retaliation one against the other. The first legacy granted to the Gifted. Many spots of the wall are cracked and broken, many phrases lost to the ravages of time, but there is no doubt that this was carved by divine hands.

Its size suggests the wall was part of something more. A castle? Cathedral? Whatever framed this monument is long gone. Only its holy story remains. A relic of glories long past.

LAST LIGHT

Local legend says that when the world last shook with calamity, when peace was rent from beneath their feet, the Gifted fell into darkness, shrouded in shadows, fumbling in fog, bereft of guidance and warmth. Then, in that deepest darkness, they found a light. The last light. A single tapered candle, pushing back the gloom. Ever burning, ever bright, it held them close. And by that light they began their lives anew.

In the exact center of Last Light is a small stone shrine housing a single tapered candle. Is it the one undying blessing that shepherded these people through the trial of a crumbling age? Is it merely a symbol carefully maintained by local priests to uphold belief in their town as a holy place? I'll leave that question to others. I think a single ever-burning candle might be the least of Last Light's miracles.

The first is that they can feed themselves. The little hamlet is shrouded in varying levels of fog, under overcast skies seemingly all the time. The brightest noon I saw there could be charitably called "murky" or less charitably "funerary." How their crops grow is beyond me. The further you get from the center of town, the more pronounced this darkness becomes. Stray too far and your own nose will soon disappear.

You would not believe how many pumpkins they had

The second is that they have not become some sort of cult. Isolation, a shared value system, hostile environment, most of the mixings are there. Perhaps they have been saved by the lack of a single charismatic figure who can live up to the perfection of their greatly revered candle. Joking aside, there is a lively faith community, and a system of shared responsibility for the central shrine and for the larger workings of the town have led to a relatively democratic, if slightly dogmatic, governing body.

The third miracle is that the dusky hamlet's population have not all died of fright. Have I mentioned the ghosts? Yes, Last Light is filled with ghosts. Absolutely lousy with them. A knock on your door is as like to be your neighbor asking for sugar as a looming specter with its face contorted

in a silent scream.

Locals tell me that they prefer the term “spirits” over ghosts. I am assured that some are undead, but not all. Some are apparitions of light and shadow. Some may be dreams or memories given shape by the gloom. Most come and go, scratching or knocking or leaving messages. Some take up residence and must be shepherded out of a home. Some take up residence and are welcomed as wispy roommates.

“Tell” - more like
whispered - everyone
here speaks so
softly!

The fourth miracle is that the people of this dreary place are so very much alive. The air of death seems to remind them how important each moment is. They approach every meeting with a bittersweet warmth of one who knows they may never see you again. They have common phrases that would make your hair stand on end in other civs, like following up even the most common of statements of intent with “unless Death gets me first.” They’ll say something is “as easy as getting stabbed in the dark,” or “as normal as a nightmare,” and any signs of glumness or a dour mood will be met with a boisterous “That’s just the oblivion talking.”

The tavernkeep hugged
and all but kissed my
cheeks before I
headed into the
town.

And I am praying for a fifth miracle, that this fascinating place will live on with little change. It has only been a year since Last Light made contact with the Shard Market, and I feel it is a culture at risk. Many young folks have left in search of brighter prospects (shielding their eyes against the sun with colored glasses and veils) . Yet unlike most newly connected places, few are migrating to fill those gaps. It takes a stern soul to buy a home whose first owner may still rattle around the attic.

Notes:

Common influences: Shadow

The Shadow-born vastly outnumber every other influence, and even Creation-born, in a show of one overwhelming influence not recorded before.

OMEER

Comfort, Creation-class entertainment, and relative safety are luxuries when you lead an adventurous lifestyle. I have spent more nights than I care to remember desperately trying to sleep on the side of a poorly-kept road with nothing but my bedroll and a prayer on my lips standing between me and disaster. Stepping foot in the valley of Omeer feels like letting go of a breath I did not realize I had been holding. A long, green valley completely surrounded by steep, snow-peaked mountains, dotted with mirror-clear lakes, this place has long been a favorite location for seers, scholars, and artists of all mediums. The relative safety of the mountains protects the people here from the worst of the weather passing by and the monsters that travel the ranges. This has afforded them a privilege like no other: the opportunity to devote themselves almost entirely to wisdom, beauty, and Dreams.

Small boats are used to travel through the city, along with small bridges, as buildings are weaved between streams and the lakes.

It is said that if one stares into the placid waters of an Omeer lake and asks a question, they will find an answer reflected back at them from the surface. It is also said that Dreams are influenced by the mystical properties of the lakes and it is wise to heed the messages within. All that happened for me when I visited was a dream about sheep that left me with an unbearable craving for a mutton sandwich upon waking. Your experience may vary if you are more spiritually inclined. Many Seers reside in the valley and consult the waters as a regular practice. The best of the prophecies gleaned from them are written down and stored in the famed Libraries of Stiria. This collection of buildings nestled within the green valley has a most impressive facade, but what they contain also boggles the mind: anything deemed worthy of preservation by the city of Radiance is sent here for safe keeping. The Council of Seers that presides over Omeer is charged with the protection, and dissemination, of information within the walls of the libraries. The centermost library is, as one might expect, a temple to Jaad, but the Council also sponsors a college of sorts where anyone may come to learn from the texts and a revolving cast of lecturers. The Council vets the quality of the instruction but they are dedicated to having a diverse offering of lessons and anyone may apply to teach.

On the second night of my visit, I was accosted with vivid dreams of walking through the very town in which I slept. When I awoke, I learned that all my traveling companions shared the same experience. Locals assure me that the phenomenon, which everyone in town experiences simultaneously, is fairly common and mostly harmless. Moreover, those influenced by Dream often find themselves lucid within the shared dreamscape, able to bend it to their will.

Omeer is a flashy and colorful place, which is starkly apparent in its residents. A long-standing access to the Radiance cluster has only made the fashion here more dramatic. Silk shirts, pants that have been pressed with hotstones, intricate embroidery, fine corsets, all manner of whims can be seen on the street with little regard for homespun practicality. A particularly popular trend is to use delicate, sheer fabrics as scarves, sleeves, and overskirts, a somewhat hubristic nod to the fact that the valley is generally considered so safe that the wearer need not worry about ripping or tearing their fine garments.

Omeer is also credited with the creation and perfection of what they refer to as “theatrical arts” - a leisurely activity in which people perform dramatic scenes in a scripted narrative. They have two dedicated theater spaces to house their devotion to this mode of public performance. The Hall of Glass is an interactive show, where patrons wander at their leisure through mirrored halls and encounter small performance vignettes along the way. There are many paths to take and performance can include music, dancing, illusions, and monologues taken from larger productions. The Hall of Glass prides itself on abstract, avant-garde showings that showcase the broad range of their creative capacity. The unusual and unexpected lie around every corner.

Much like their litting accents and ostentatious use of large vocabulary.

The second theater is the Shattered Playhouse, named for the central stage of their production venue, which is a platform made entirely of stained glass panels in a variety of colors, shapes, and sizes. Performances here run nearly every week but the real prizes are the quarterly performances from the in-house acting troupe known as the Shattered Cast. Their performances are always original plays and feature lighting, sound effects, and the best acting of the entire Radiance cluster. It is considered a massive honor to be offered a place with the Shattered Cast and their standards are almost as high as the mountains encasing the valley.

Notes:

Common influences: Dream, Light, Elemental: Water

OXIA

It takes a certain disposition to remove an ancient curse, and an even more unusual disposition to look that curse in the eye, shrug, and continue working around it. The residents of Oxia have built their culture up around a cursed and blighted land that rewards their tenacity with seemingly endless iron deposits to be harvested. It's not clear whether the curse on the land predates its use as a dumping ground, or if the refuse buried below the surface is its cause. What is known is that the soil is barren, and farming on the monadnock upon which the town rests, the poisoned land around the base, and for miles downstream of the river (known as the Red Waters due to runoffs from the Rust Mine), is exceedingly difficult.

There's a shrine to Faya on the outskirts of town. Locals don't tend to visit, as it's run by a company chaplain.

As with many civs relying on a single mode of industry, the people of Oxia value hard work and the relationships that form between workers on shift, who seem to spend more time with each other than with their blood families. They tend to be skeptical of people in positions of authority until the person in question has adequately demonstrated their skill and aptitude. Once trust is gained, Oxians are fiercely loyal cohorts who believe to the core in pulling together and putting their hearts and backs into getting the job done. The authority in town is known as "The Company," who make sure the workers are kept on balanced shifts, get paid and fed regularly, and keep the workhouses kept up and comfortable. Representatives of the Company are just called "Management," who are largely seen as a necessary evil to keep things organized, but who's every command or directive is met with a sneer and a rash of grumblng. Since connecting to the Shard Market, there has been heavy emigration of Oxians in search of greener pastures. Despite the reduced workforce, the influx of cheap iron into a larger market has brought wealth to Oxia, along with new members of Management, who think they can improve the operations of The Company.

Don't call anyone boss. It's insulting to be seen as associated with the Management.

That pragmatism extends to their mode of dress, usually in hard-wearing garments, hand-me-down gear, and, more recently, leather aprons and armor (provided you can get Management to sign off on an import requisition form from the Shard Market, leather cannot be easily

manufactured here due to the difficulty of raising livestock). When traveling through the Circles, Oxians make an effort to be keenly aware of what is upstream from their source of water. The phrase, “always know what’s upstream” is frequently used both literally and figuratively, to encourage people to pay attention to the effects of their actions. Items made of iron, even with expert craftsmanship, are considered to have little to no value. Broken weapons, armor, and shields are frequently left on the field, because it’s not worth the effort to carry them back to town. There’s always more iron in the Rust Mines.

Notes:

Common influences: Elemental: Earth, Elemental: Air

RED LAKE

Red Lake is, shockingly, named for its large central lake. Its waters are stained deep red by both the natural iron deposits and other sources... less mundane. The town is located in a crater rimmed at the top by large rocks. The area above the rim is frequently bedeviled with dangerous, powerful storms that make the survivability of buildings rather low (and people even lower), so the entirety of this civ crams into the bottom of the crater. Some arcanists believe that the iron suffusing the soil is imbued with magical energy, but as far as I can tell it just makes farming a challenge. The Lake Folk have devised a system of catching rainfall near the top of the rim to supply fresh drinking water before it mixes with the hard water of the lake.

Eat local food with extreme caution! Plants take up the iron in the soil from the Gorefalls. A potato will have a particularly metallic tang, and twist your stomach right proper.

Cleaning and maintaining these devices is a part of every citizen's life. "To each child a nail and each parent a hammer," they say. Their days are dictated by an intricate "Shift System" whereby everyone from the teetering toddlers to creaking crones do their time to clean and maintain the gutters and other aqueducture. The Lake has five shifts that are "on shift" for five days at a time. Each citizen is assigned to their shift when they come of age at eight years old, based on whichever shift currently has the least number of people. Their "shift family" will only change as their profession changes later in life, as great care is taken to ensure that "shift changes" never pull away too much of any one industry or family. Unfortunately the system is far from perfect. Folks are often forced to hand off ongoing projects or time sensitive tasks as they go on shift, leaving things unattended as nothing has a higher priority than their shift. As a result, Lake Folk place high value on clear and honest communication. The balance of survival is so delicate and dependent on the work of dozens, lying, especially as it pertains to getting things done, is seen as one the most egregious of moral failings. Calling someone a liar in Red Lake is as serious as calling someone a murderer in other civs, and known liars, even if only caught being dishonest once, are often social pariahs.

Even the slightest of exaggeration can be the cause of suspicion and scorn. When I said "my feet are killing me, after a long day of walking, the innkeeper looked down at my boots, then back up at my face with a scowl. I had to pay double for my drinks that night.

Everyone native to this civ, from the oldest shift supervisor to the smallest apprentice, wears a red hat at all times. They have embraced the

rather unimaginative nickname "Redcaps" given by outsiders, in reference I suppose to the odd and murderous creatures from ancient mythology that color their hats with the blood of their victims. Ghastly, but do not be alarmed. The people of Red Lake are not unhinged supernatural beings, but rather incredibly practical and down-to-earth ones. The storms that rage above Red Lake are subject to the local planar influence and produce a phenomenon known as the Gorefall - a monsoon of blood. This event always wreaks havoc with the water system, thus requiring the around-the-clock labor to ensure potable drinking water.

Do not wear clothing that cannot be ruined. It falls in sheets at the drop of a hat... which is probably why they never drop their hats..

The red hats sported by residents are a practical measure, as the storms are frequent, and the blood is very staining. It has evolved over time into a form of self-expression with some 'caps out on travel collecting a large array of various fanciful coverings while others own only a single austere hat. Little emphasis is placed on most other garb within Red Lake as washing anything will eventually give it the sickly orange hue caused by iron-laden water. The red hat has also taken on a more symbolic meaning. Gorefalls are intense and unpredictable, leading Lake Folk to keep their hats on at nearly all times. Removal of one's hat for more than a moment or two is a sign of confidence and comfort. A Redcap hanging up their hat out of reach should be considered a sign of extreme trust and be repaid in kind.

Notes:

Common influences: Blood, Elemental: Earth

THE SHALLOWS

Folk in long-established civs like Radiance and Tin El'Shin, with the luxury of having their day-to-day life not necessarily focused on survival against shifting planar forces, tend to look down on superstitious people outside their walls. But in the Shallows, folklore and history are one and the same. The stories of their forebears are tangible, and they're just as reasonable an explanation as anything else.

The Shallows is a small, densely populated archipelago arranged in a circle. Each island has multiple ports and docks, and their primary industries are exporting goods from the sea, including fish and sea-salt. The name is derived from the central lagoon around which the islands are set. The light-blue water of the lagoon is warm, shallow, and much safer than the near-black water outside the ring. Most do not travel outside as the sea beyond the island barriers is rough and home to creatures that make your tallest tales seem short. How comfortable would you feel sailing through water you can't see into, wondering if that's just a rock your boat has brushed over or if it is the eyestalk of a thirty-foot angler-shark, or worse?

Artifice is the god to whom the central shrine is dedicated and deep blues and purples are frequent colors of decoration to honor her and the sea upon which their lives depend. It is common practice for a sailor to throw an offering of coin or other valuables into the deep in an effort to bargain for their safety before setting off on a long journey - whether the offering is for Artifice or for the sea itself does not seem to matter. A popular legend of the Shallows describes the life and adventures of the most famous of the Artifician sailors and the treasure hoard he supposedly buried somewhere within the lagoon. It has not yet been found, but that has only furthered the fervor around finding its location, giving rise to treasure hunting as a hobby many Shallowsfolk take up at some point in their lives. Every imperfection in a tree, rock or piece of coral is analyzed as a "secret message" which will hopefully lead to further clues as to the location of the buried treasure. Even beyond the lost treasure, it seems that every habit and local custom derives from some ancient story of the sea, and asking someone why something is or why it's done will often result in

The fashion looks to be an outdated Tin El'Shin trend, and is far more weather-worn by the winds, with layered salt-crusted jackets, tall boots, and billowy sleeves.

them spinning an elaborate tale about loss, betrayal and overcoming impossible odds to explain something as simple as shaking hands.

Not all Shallowsfolk are sailors but it is impossible to exist here without relying on the bounty of the sea. The proximity colors their clothing as much as it colors their vocabulary. To "meet in the Shallows" is to have a peaceful discussion, such as when the council is called for a conference and each island sends its representative to meet in the Shallows to discuss the issues at hand. To be "sailing the blue waters" means you're in a place of calm and safety, while someone "in deep waters" is likely in danger. Elders among the Shallowsfolk are called "salts," most likely in reference to the amount of salt their clothing has accumulated, and outsiders are often called "green gills," likely as a reference to the outward effects of seasickness. The nautical language of seafarers peppers conversation and can be challenging for landlubber visitors to decipher, as can the little folk-rituals the Shallowsfolk perform.

Each island has their own specific traditions but for example, when someone hears bad news, they perform a reflexive hand gesture, a quick crossed fingers tapped against their chest over their heart, to prevent attracting that bad luck. When births are celebrated, bracelets are made from the rope of the family's boat and shared among guests, and when final deaths are mourned, a rope from the family's boat is burned for them. The rope becomes a symbol, its ties hold the community together, the emotional connection becoming just as real for them as the ropes holding the sails together, the ropes holding their homes against the wind. Tied down. Tied together.

Notes:

Common influences: Elemental: Water, Elemental: Air, Shadow

Each island has its own rules and regulations, making the council meetings very busy, to say the least.

"Port" is left and "Starboard" is right, "Windward" is into the wind, "Leeward" is downwind. If you get nothing else from these pages, remember these before going to The Shallows.

THE SPEAR

Stone Crown, the Top of the World, Skypiercer. This great mountain, towering through the clouds, is given all manner of grand names by those who visit. Those who live there simply call it The Spear. As clear and to the point as its residents.

Let us start our examination at the top, at the very tip of the spear. On the summit of the mountain, what many believe to be the highest location in all the known world, sits a massive, flat gray stone - a table, hewn by storms. This is an ancient altar to the Wylds. Flowing from its base is an impossibility that makes life on The Spear possible, a fresh water spring which winds its way down and around the peak in a long trough. The clear waters barely distort the view of its channel which is lined with deep red stone, a stark contrast to the dull grays that surround. Whether that red stone is natural or placed by builders long forgotten, who can say? In either case, the hue has led residents to call the spring The Wound.

The fresh waters of The Wound are the only constant source of comfort for those who live on The Spear. The area inhabited by Gifted lies entirely above the mountain's treeline, a zone they call The Blade. The Blade is a steep expanse of gray and weathered stone, barren of life except for sporadic scrub bushes. Well, that and the people who have made it their home. This windswept crown is dotted with stacked homes built out of that same gray rock. The dwellings are not luxurious, no mansions or halls here, appearing as little more than outcroppings and jutting formations. Inside they are... is it rude to say they are nest like? They are as I imagined the inner workings of burrows or a bear's winter cave. They are lined with comfort, with hanging furs and pieces of art, sealed against the elements.

Perhaps the most curious aspect of homes on The Spear is their entrances. Each is set well above head height, necessitating ladders or scrambling over rock faces to clamber into. This structural oddity is no product of regional fancy, but of pure pragmatism. And the source of that necessitated pragmatism can be found as we take our tour further down

Windswept? More like wind-shorn. A storm on The Spear feels like Harvester's own tempest. This may be the source of the occasional patches of air influenced residents.

It seems that changing homes over ones life is normal. Hale and hardy folk live on the lower, outer edges while the old or infirm reside higher up the mountain in the heart of the populated section. (cont)

the mountain to where The Blade meets the treeline. Where the realm claimed by Gifted gives way to The Haftwood.

These homes are more often equipped with stairs or pulley systems for access, though those systems too are collapsed or pulled away when not in use.

The Haftwood may be the most feral stretch of land to which I have ever borne witness, though I freely admit to doing so from a healthy distance while under local escort. The growth of trees is so thick that torchlight is needed even in daylight. Torchlight is likewise recommended to ward off the greatest threat, local wildlife.

It is commonly known that the influence of Blood can create abnormally hardy individuals. Nature can sometimes result in similar physical toughness. The Haftwood appears to have both in abundance, and the resulting flora and fauna are something to behold. Let us take, as an example, the humble rabbit. In most of the world a small, unthreatening creature. Once caught it might make a meal for one or two. A Haftwood Hare on the other hand stands nearly hip-height, kicks like an ox, and could swap table places with farmbred holiday hams. With foxes the size of wolves, wolves like bears, and bears that beleaguer belief... I too might place my doors out of reach.

The threat and bounty of The Haftwood define life on The Spear. The stony dwellings on The Blade are mostly safe from the wildlife. But they must be supported with timber from the trees. Water is provided by The Wound, but the rocks grow little sustenance. So the means of life is gathered daily from the source of danger, from the floors and boughs of The Haftwood itself. These very same resources have made The Spear an interesting trading partner once connected to the Shard Market. A tourist destination it is not, but where else can you get a single pelt large enough for the whole family or a single timber to be the backbone of an entire town's hall?

DO NOT ATTEMPT TO TRANSPORT LIVE WILDLIFE. Export of living Haftwood wildlife is illegal as they are considered invasive species in all other known biomes. A single breeding pair could devastate a region

The creature comforts of the wider world have done little to change the people of The Spear these last five years. Certainly garments beyond hides have been a welcome change as well as greatly increased access to skillfully forged steel. But the daily need to raid the dangerous Haftwood keep traditions strong. Nowhere is this more apparent than in The Ordeal.

Any member of the society may approach the priest who cares for the altar on the peak and ask to undergo The Ordeal. The following day they descend from the peak into the Haftwood. Their goal? To lead an animal of their choosing from the wood to the peak, alive. Wrestling, roping, goading, even leading the animal in a chase are all permitted, so long as it can move under its own power once atop the altar. There, with the priest's oversight, it is sacrificed in a rite of thanks to the forest and to the Wylds.

When one completes an Ordeal that animal becomes their symbol. Traditionally, the pelt is incorporated into their clothing. Those who have ventured forth from The Spear have made a point of incorporating signs and symbols of their animal into any foreign clothing they adopt.

Most residents of The Spear will only undergo an Ordeal once or twice in their life. Once in their adolescence as they declare themselves of age (shedding their given name and choosing one for themselves), and perhaps again in later life to set their place more firmly in society. Though there is nothing stopping someone from undergoing an Ordeal many, many times. It is a very personal process and is as much a declaration of intent as a test of skill. I mistakenly thought that those who conquered the most powerful animals would lead on The Spear. My guide, a powerful man bedecked with hewn boar tusks the length of my forearm, spoke with awe at how the current priest earned their position by leading a hummingbird from deep within the woods on a leash of a single thread. "The Spear offers many lessons," he told me, "We decide which we will learn."

Notes:

Common influences: Blood, Elemental: Air, Nature

The Blood-born are incredibly prominent and thriving.

THERION, "THE GLISTENING SPIRE"

Creation is full of magic, mystery, and visions that can quite take your breath away. One of the most logic-defying features is that of Therion and its Glistening Spire. Therion is a literal oasis in a vast and harsh desert. It is a brutally hot, arid landscape and it is only through the providence of the Glistening Spire that the civ can exist at all. Looming high above the town is a massive column of ice, which can be seen from many miles away. The ice seems to be imbued with elemental planar energy as it has never melted in the desert sun. It has been reported that for weeks after harvest, Therion ice does not melt without being purposely heated, and does not even begin to perspire for several hours after it is cut from the Spire.

The local shrine is dedicated to the Wylds, the adherent faithful tend to have a greater affinity for elementals as they are more prevalent than flora and fauna here. Therion exists on the knife edge of hot-cold and starve-plenty, and maintaining the balance between civilization and nature is a daily focus for all. The Ice Guilds oversee the harvesting and distribution of ice taken from the Spire to ensure that the vital resource is not squandered and that no one goes without. Out of habit, all citizens of Therion would not be caught dead without a container of ice water, and the means to serve it to at least a half-dozen people. When eating meals, they will always offer their final bite to those on either side of them, though it is customary for a Therion to refuse the offer and insist its owner finish unless they really need it. When gathering natural resources, it is critical to never deplete a source that would otherwise replenish itself and to always leave something for those traveling behind you.

If you choose to visit, take great care upon arrival. The Circle is dangerous to access as it is situated a ways into the desert. Historically, this civ was once much larger and due to some ancient, forgotten disaster, much of it was abandoned to the shifting dunes as the survivors clustered tightly around the base of the Spire. It is possible that at some point the location of the Circle was more logical, or at least easier to access. The way is patrolled by guards who are tasked with challenging the dangerous creatures that stalk through the sands and also to carry large pieces of ice

The court supporting the local monarchy represents a significant portion of the total population. I suspect this is due to a government which used to preside over a much larger city being unable, or unwilling, to acclimate. The size of the court is irrelevant, though. It's an open secret that the true power in Therion lies with the Ice Guilds.

A largely meat-based diet, reliant on hunting the creatures of the desert, though they have more recipes for preparing cactus than anywhere else I've encountered.

with them. This enables the guards to keep themselves cool, but also to provide for travelers that emerge from the Circle and need assistance making it to town.

Regardless of profession, citizens of Therion dress to accommodate the fluctuation between hot and cold. The desert bakes during the day and freezes at night, but simply wandering in and out of the shadow of the frozen colossus while going about daily business can mean a significant difference in comfort. The members of the Ice Guilds wear tougher, more practical garments to keep them warm inside the Spire and protected during encounters with the elementals that inhabit it. Artisans, merchants, the royal class, and laborers rely on layers to protect from the sun and to keep cool. In the blinding heat of mid-day, class can often only be identified by the quality and saturation of color of the fabrics as almost everyone on the street, if they are out at all at mid-day, is covered head to toe in drape.

Notes:

Common influences: Elemental: Water, Elemental: Fire

TIN WIVERS

If you were some mad explorer, traipsing across an arid patch of endless nothing, buffeted by ever changing storms, struck with thunder and hail, swept by snow squalls and heaving in heat haze all in the same day, you might spot a most miraculous haven on the horizon. A massive plateau, with lush flora crowning its edge, and waterfalls cascading into misty clouds, dispersed before they could quench the ground hundreds of feet below. If you could climb these steep cliffs (and brave the hardy wildlife of its base and sides), you might find yourself in the most curious cityscape of Tin Wivers.

Life and living in Tin Wivers has been bound up with its parent state (Tin El'Shin, obviously) for so long that the people and cultures are nigh indistinguishable. In spite of this, or perhaps because it had a close partner to fulfill other needs, Tin Wivers has grown economically around its singular specialized industry. Unless you've only just stumbled through a Circle for the first time, you know that that industry is clothing.

What fewer people know is that the current trend obsessed city of mad innovation grew from very practical needs. My introduction to this description was not mere poetry. Constant storms, winds, ever shifting temperatures, and all the headaches that come with unpredictable precipitation bred certain necessity. A cotton robe here and a fur cloak there hardly sufficed in a place where in one day I took breakfast beside a snow drift, trudged to lunch in mud and sweltering heat, and paired dinner with peals of thunder. Such strange and shifting conditions gave rise to all manner of inventions. Thin cloths that hold heat, luridly bright fabrics in every influence hue, a careful print to replace stiff embroidery, sharp tailored cuts for dinner dress that likewise repel water and open for greater airflow. Every garment must serve more than one need, and any tailor with their shop would make their customers look distinctive to boot.

In these few years since the Shard Market's connection this specialization has redoubled and the products of Tin Wivers are everywhere. Who doesn't own something made with their heavy blue Worker's Weave? In light of the increased demand, many smaller shops have banded together

Strongly suggest investigating trends prior to your visit, then doing everything not to follow them. You'll never get today's style quite right, so you might as well be distinctly different rather than a foreigner failing to pass.

That's what we call "denim" in Radiance. Truly remarkable stuff.

to hand manufacture larger supplies. But the true specialists will still throw months, or even years into a truly remarkable, and functional, new product, spurred ever further by the bizarre habitats in which their new clientele reside.

Notes:

Common influences: Nature, Elemental: Air, Light

TIPSHORE

Tipshore is an unusual civ - a massive island, so large it can take several weeks to traverse on foot, composed of three smaller civs that take it in turn to support each other, called Hal, Pikit, and Placit. Though these three larger population centers are far apart, they are completely allied and depend on one another to thrive. Many people live in all three places over the course of their life, and families split across the island. There is a Circle that allows for easy transportation from one side of the island to the other, but the island is so well mapped and studied that most residents prefer to walk rather than wait for an opening. Now that there is a connection to the Shard Market and people have a means to leave the island without braving the seas, many from this civ choose to pursue the lifestyle of an explorer.

The culture of walking is a spiritual part of life on Tipshore, with a basis in a very physical problem. The island's name accurately describes the landscape - the western end is raised far above the waters, rocky cliffs hanging over the raging sea. The eastern end is level with the water, a coast of coarse shores. But the eastern end is also slowly, year by year, sinking. More and more of the island is lost to the ocean and Placit rises higher and higher. The island is tipping.

The story goes that when the tipping was first discovered, a child proposed that they move stones from the eastern shore to the western one in order to make it heavier. Now it is a coming-of-age ritual called the Walk of Stones to take a stone from Pikit, the easternmost civ, and carry it by hand to Placit, the westernmost civ, and place it on a pile of other such stones. A newer, but perhaps more practical tradition, is that those traveling through the Circles to other lands try to return with at least one foreign stone. A little piece of the outside world to build up their sinking home.

Despite the island being well-mapped, traversing Tipshore is a dangerous endeavor and is not taken lightly. The dense jungles ringing the island are disorienting and filled with predators. At the center is a massive, shattered landscape of shiny and angular dunes of a black stone known as the

They say the jungle is so dense, you cannot see the sunlight.

Obsidian Field. It is impossible to cross the island without passing through this expanse. The distance is such that if a person dies in the Field, they are guaranteed to become Lost. Hal, the most central civ, is located just on the border of the Field and offers protection to those making the Walk of Stones. They also guard Pikit from the wandering elementals that sometimes leave the field and threaten the safety of the people beyond. When a person completes their first Walk successfully, they become recognized as a mature adult and are permitted to wear jewelry crafted from the material of the Obsidian Field.

Don't forget the hundred-foot tall Spire of Obsidian in the middle of the Field - which the locals casually shrug about.

The people that live on Tipshore are of many lineages and planar influences, with none being any more dominant than the other. Because of the variety of people, as well as the three distinct city-based cultures, there's not a lot to unify them to an outsider except for one strange habit - they refer to "down" as "East" and "up" as "West" - which only adds to the confusion because they don't have alternate words for East and West. A native of Tipshore would never mistake one for the other, as they'll always understand from context, but it provides no end of amusement to them as travelers spin and try to orient themselves to find West when they're being told to look up.

Due to the encroaching sea, Pikit has had to be moved inland multiple times. The people care little about the permanent and ensure that anything worth keeping forever is portable. Their clothing tends to have many pockets to accommodate their belongings in case of a sudden incursion from the ocean. They keep Hal supplied with food and supplies in exchange for Hal's continued protection. Placit is a much larger and more established place. Surrounded by a stone wall, the town lists ever upwards. The tallest structure is a massive timepiece - in days past it was a sundial that reflected against the wall of the meeting house. Thanks to the tipping, it can no longer keep time, despite continued attempts at reconfiguration. Tipshore is home to many talented tinkerers and engineers and they were able to create an enormous mechanical timepiece that needs only to be wound to maintain the correct display.

Ruins buried in the jungle nearby provided trinkets and materials needed to make things like wound timepieces, boxes that play music, switch-

activated alchemical lights, and many other odd and interesting items. You can recognize the tinkering folk by their multi-lensed glasses used to inspect small things, specially designed bags for their highly personalized tool sets, and the bits and baubles that hang from them in a somewhat haphazard way. Looking at a resident of Placit puts me in mind of a kitchen catch-all drawer brought to life and trying to explain its latest attempt at crafting a mechanical people-mover with just a ball of twine, a half-eaten packet of pastry, and a deck of playing cards with all of the even numbers missing.

Notes:

Common influences: Elemental: Earth, Elemental: Fire, Nature

Likely due to Tipshore's size, there are no truly "rare" influences, the listed are simply the most predominant.

TWO TOWNS

WARNING: Circle exit may be under water. Plan accordingly.

TwoTowns is as its name implies, a single Circle deposits visitors along a river equidistant between two towns. In one direction is Upver and in the other is Dunstrem. As you might have guessed already, the local dialect enjoys running words together and insisting the resulting hodgepodge is something new (and the local dialect users enjoy arguing with each other over which made up words are “real”).

Contrary to the names of these two settlements however, neither is up nor down the river from the other. Or perhaps they are both simultaneously? We'll have to widen our view for it to make sense. The entirety of TwoTowns exists within a long valley, raised on either end, surrounded by steep cliff sides. At both ends a waterfall descends from those cliffs, fills a small pond, and those ponds each stream out toward the center of the valley. Those two rivers meet in the middle, currents sweeping into one another, swirling gently.

I hear some astute cartographers asking, “is it a river or a stream? How is a lake not formed at the meeting place? If there is constantly water flowing in and seemingly no outlet how were these idyllic little townships not drowned centuries ago?” The flow of water is not constant, or at least not consistent. When the flow of the waterfall above Upver is heavy, the one above Dunstrem is light. The opposite is likewise true. So it is that every few months the direction of the river changes. When one end is bursting its banks the other's water recedes, leaving fresh soil. Only seldom do the two ends match in strength, with flood or recession across the valley.

Farming is very nearly the only profession, and changing tides make it unpredictable. When the waters recede, crops go in. Will they be ready for harvest before the waters return? It's anyone's guess. Seasons of boom and bust make TwoTowns a place of plenty and famine in equal measure, and it has bred a people that are adaptable (or laxachangicle as one local insisted I say).

My guide insisted “laxachangicle” is not a word. Her partner instantly began using it.

TwoTowns introduction to the Shard Market is a prime example of this attitude. When it was first mapped the dwellings of both towns were utilitarian wooden structures on sturdy stilts. Residents with their pants and skirts hemmed up above the calf. Broad woven hats protected against the sun. Simple. Functional. However, as I penned my notes it was in a yellow striped Dunstrem inn with carpeted floors overseen by a lass in a Shallows long coat with a cake themed fascinator perched among her curls. Though I noted her miner's cloth pants had been changed for easy raising when the waters are up. In short, TwoTowns has embraced the outside world with an enthusiasm matched only by its disregard for sense.

Dunstrem Inn -
Still yellow striped,
carpets ruined by
water and removed,
overseer sporting a
Velmake apron and
Red Laker's cap.

I suspect, in coming years, this cultural flood too shall recede, and I look forward to what new crops will bloom from it.

Notes:
Common influences: Nature, Elemental: Water

ULFRYTH

Initial expeditions to Ulfryth were exceptionally difficult, as during one journey an Explorer found a sun-drenched grassy taiga inhabited by a few hundred people, and the next opened onto a desolate snowfield without a sign of civilization in sight. After many more failed expeditions that could not find the taiga again, it was a traveler in the Shard Market, claiming to hail from Ulfryth, who explained the truth.

There is a swath of inhabitable climate that moves in a year-long journey around a central point. This area, a dozen miles or so across, contains lush grasslands, thriving moss-filled bogs, and rivers teeming with fish. What it moves through, however, is an unlivable tundra, where the temperatures are so low that a Gifted can freeze to death within a matter of hours if not prepared for the cold. The people, thirty or so families, that move with the shifting swath call their home "Ulfryth," and have learned the pattern of climate migration over the centuries so they can live long, comfortable lives within it. Once per year, for a period of about a month, the local Circle is within the area of safety, and travel becomes possible. This is when traders who have spent the rest of the year collecting valuable resources from the land go to the Shard Market to sell what they have and purchase items like cloth, forged weapons, and plant-based goods that are plentiful in other parts of the world. The people have no use for gold or silver, nor anything other places would consider a luxury. They have to carry their world on their backs as they move, so they have no room for extravagance.

What Ulfryth has an abundance of is korba. The unrefined material can be found in small deposits all through the wasteland, and the people have mastered its gathering, leaving not a speck of it behind as the area of safety moves, forcing them to move with it. When the annual pattern finishes, and they have returned to the same area they were in a year ago, new deposits have formed on the newly thawed ground, allowing the cycle to repeat. This abundance has allowed the people to create twenty-four shrines in a great ring across the land, ensuring that at least one is out from under the cover of ice and snow at all times, allowing the souls of the dead to return to their home.

It is said that the korba prices from Ulfryth are very low, but because the things they trade for are usually bulky and heavy, it makes up for the relative lack of value. A few merchants have made quite a fortune buying up the entire stock of Ulfryth's korba with an abundance of various goods, then selling it at the normal market value slowly for the rest of the year.

Some have said they actually have a mobile shrine that they carry with them, but that can't be the case, as such things are impossible within the bounds of ritual magic.

Ulfryth is still a cold place, and the inhabitants tend to dress in durable clothing made of oiled leather and heavy furs. Many dangerous animals and monsters come from the icy wasteland, so every inhabitant is taught to fight or wield magic from an early age, so that the entire population can unite in defense when threatened. It is not only the duties of defense that are shared - the people of Ulfryth share all things among the population ensuring no one ever needs for food, clothing, or other basic needs. It is a widely held belief that the natural talents of those born in Ulfryth will always be exactly what the next generation needs to thrive, so any affinity or aptitude is nurtured and encouraged among the young.

As a culture that relies so heavily on natural cycles, and very much lives within one, the worship of the Wylds is widespread, followed closely by Elya. The people of Ulfryth do not see being Ascended as a position of authority, but just another required role so that they can survive year after year. The people are ruled, with the term used very loosely, by the eldest living members of the community, and deference to one's elder, no matter the family affiliation, is one of their core values. It is just assumed that those that are older are also wiser, and thus any decree or declaration from the eldest are obeyed as strictly as codified laws or religious tenets. The family lines are all associated with an animal, with the Families Raven, Wolf, Bear, Snowcat, Elk and Hawk being the largest. There are over one hundred families in Ulfryth in total, though some are only a handful of members.

Given the tightness of family lines and the desire to venerate the eldest, there are remarkably few names given to newborn children. A boy named "Ulf" (the most common name in the civ) might be named for his father, his grandfather, or both, and that tradition goes back so many generations that they may be the twentieth or thirtieth "Ulf" in the family line. To differentiate one another, everyone gets a "nickname" at some point in their youth, reflecting some moment or occurrence during their childhood. A child born under a full moon might be named Ulf but called Moonlight, for example. In my journey to Ulfryth I heard such names as Nightfall (because they always cried at sunset as a baby), Clover (for enjoying picking clovers as a child), Shiver (for the one time they fell in a near-

Name duplication is such a problem that several civs REQUIRE the inclusion of an Ulfryth-ian's nickname on any official documentation.

frozen pond), Gnash (for their tendency to chew on things as a baby) and Notch (because of their notched ear, earned during a childhood archery accident). The people of Ulfryth will therefore introduce themselves by their nickname and given name - "I am Notch, born Ulf of the Family Elk," or "I am Clover, born Jaya of the Family Bear" for example.

All of their common turns of phrase seem to be centered around the weather. Sayings like "I feel snow coming" or "going to be cold tomorrow" will denote a worry or bad feeling about the coming day, while "sun will be coming" or "it'll be warm soon enough" is a message of hope for the future. When a problem is solved or a task completed, they will say that it is "frozen over," to denote it will not need to be addressed again anytime soon, and something "sticking out of the mud" is a problem that needs to be addressed in the near future.

Despite the inhospitable climate, and hardships of a forced nomadic life, the people of Ulfryth are warm and welcoming to outsiders, as long as they're willing to pitch in and lend a hand during their stay. For a few hours of picking cloudberry and helping gather firewood, you can join in on a night-long feast of roasted elk with as much mead as you can drink. Just make sure you find your way back to the Circle before the snows come in, or you'll be stuck there for the rest of the year - though I can think of worse ways of passing my days.

Notes:

Common influences: Nature, Elemental: Water, Elemental: Air

VELMAKE

Long ago, the civ of Velmake was a cold, snowy evergreen forest and thrived harvesting trees for lumber and sap for adhesives and sweetener. Over time, the forest became infected with bugs and Chaos and ultimately, a great fissure opened in the ground beneath them and sent everything deep into the earth. Velmake had foreseen the Split and was able to prepare enough to prevent complete ruin, eventually rebuilding their society underground. While the people have found ways to get back on to the surface, the land is ravaged and broken by the forces of Corruption and the forest is unpredictable and even more dangerous than ever before. Instead, they have found a way to thrive below.

The older generation call Velmake, Penroot - Velmake is the civ's name given by Radiance, and not all have adjusted

Living underground has provided enough safety that the town has expanded into a large, spiraling network of tunnels and chambers. Progress has been difficult and slow and it is not uncommon to unexpectedly uncover a pocket of Chaos needing to be cleansed. It was through the rebuilding efforts that the Circle Chamber was found and opened, and eventually connected Velmake to Radiance.

Velmakers have - what is it - reverse claustrophobia? Even the scouts that do surface runs are skittish under the open sky.

The people of Velmake, either from their heritage of forestry or their modern life in the welcoming embrace of the earth, are known for their green thumbs. The figurative kind. Traditionally, a stone or dirt from near one's home is carried on far journeys to maintain their connection to the comfort and safety of their subterranean homeland. The tradition has changed somewhat as Velmake expanded and gained better access to trade and the people found a love for new plants and flowers. Alchemists with botanical specializations dedicated to breeding colorful, but hardy, flowers that can handle Velmake's austere climate. The seeds are planted every time their bearer loses a Gift. Upon the Final Death, the remaining seeds are planted in a large communal garden at the heart of Velmake. Even if the body cannot be returned to its native soil, Velmakers will take great care and effort to ensure that their seeds are returned to the whole. The traditionalists that still carry stones or earth will also have their pods added to the garden.

The people of Velmake dress with practicality and durability in mind.

Canvas, wool, and leather, often in camouflage-tones of deep blues, dark grays, and winter greens. Their nod to "fashion" in an otherwise visual drabness is a flair for asymmetry - double-breasted jackets, long tails on the back of coats, single sleeves (when they are not fighting the cold), tunics with an angled cut, diagonal seams, or decoration and pattern on only one side...the bizarre and very personal decorative touches are almost like a reflexive response to the chaos that has shaped their home for generations.

Notes:

Common influences: Chaos, Elemental: Earth

RADIANCE OUTPOST - BRIGHT HOLLOW

When a Shard Market Circle led to an unpopulated area with heavy shadow influence, Radiance was quick to claim it as their own. Danger was certain to abound, undead thrive when hidden away from the sun, but with that rare influence, at least rare in Radiance's cluster, comes promises of the equally difficult to obtain korba.

Early months saw great progress. The building of a town center, garrisoning against Grumach's sway, reports of shadow korba nodes, the promise of prosperity to come. Then it all stopped. Barely a year after its founding Bright Hollow went dark. Circle openings to the Shard Market saw only undead beyond. Brave search parties returned as spirits or not at all.

But, after years have passed, now is the time. Radiance will reclaim what was theirs! On the auspicious high holy day of Bellinger and Faya a party shall set out in force to cut through the undead horde, reestablish their hold, and uncover the fate of their predecessors. Light shall shine once more in Bright Hollow.

TIN EL'SHIN OUTPOST - TIN TOR'AN

Planar influences are a strange and somewhat incomprehensible force in our world at the best of times. The way they shape our lands, our weather, our very bodies can sometimes be extreme. Tin Tor'An is an extreme among extremes. While most lands are predominantly influenced by one or two planes the outpost of Tin Tor'An experiences an ever shifting cascade of influences colliding, competing, and overlapping.

The unique phenomena of this area made it obviously desirable to those in Tin El'Shin who wish to more fully understand the fundamentals of our world. A research outpost was established and has slowly expanded to support a growing hamlet of curious minds.

But these unique lands are not without their unique risks, magical, mundane, and otherwise. Outpost Administrator Lysander Dalinar has put forth a call for adventurers of all kinds to make their way to Tin Tor'An. To brave its trials, to make safe its ruins, and to delve deeply into the mysteries in which it is mired.