

WORLD OF ÆRCHUS NOTES

TIMEFRAME AND HISTORICAL PARALLELS

Ærchus is actually Earth far in the future. Current societies mark the passage of history through four distinct ages: the Age of Creation, the Age of Dreams (actually 0 AD to c. 3001 AD), the Age of Ignorance (following a great cataclysm spawned by terrorist actions, known to contemporary scholars as The Shivering), and the Age of History. This latter age is divided into two eras: First and Second, though these distinctions are made only in scholarly works. The First Era marks the rise of civilisation from the wasteland that characterised the Age of Ignorance, while the Second begins with the decline of the Tårnic Empire, a civilisation similar in many respects to the ancient Rome of Earth. The current year is 998 AH, and it has been roughly four generations (92 years) since the fall of the Tårn (thus, the Tårnic Empire lasted some 906 years; its peak around 752).

The Tårnic Empire still exists, though it suffered greatly from its fall at the hands of civil war, rebellious provinces, and invading armies. As a result, the Tårn have retreated from their farthest outposts, though they still command great influence about their homeland, Mare Nostrum. As they have fallen back, they have left behind many ruins and scattered bits of their technology. Their most widespread influence remains their ancient tongue, Tårnic, which is akin to Latin, and used primarily as the language of scholars and sorcerers (In Tårn today, the common tongue is known as Cyndic, which, while more modern and cosmopolitan, possesses noticeable roots in Tårnic).

As an historical parallel, consider the fall of the Tårn to be in many respects similar to the fall of the Roman Empire during the fifth century AD. As the Romans left their outposts, they also left the people they conquered to the mercies of their neighbours (and themselves), and the new isolation of the Tårn has led to civil and martial conflict in many of their prior holdings, as their marginally civilised charges return to barbaric states, and raiding and plunder once again become common paths toward conquest and survival.

If a direct comparison between Ærchus and Earth is desired, the GM may view the current period as the general equivalent of the late fifth century of our own world (i.e., the Dark Ages).

Despite that, certain technological anachronisms do exist. To rationalise these, assume that certain sages or sorcerers have managed to uncover the secrets of these technologies from deeply rooted areas of the distant past (i.e., the Age of Dreams). An overview of the most prominent examples follow:

- * Plate mail armour (i.e., plate mixed with chain to allow mobility) is in use by highly advanced cultures, though full plate is generally unknown, as smithing technology has not yet reached the required level of craftsmanship. This is not to say that full plate is non-existent; instead, its construction is not yet considered practical for actual combat. Where it does exist, it is used only for military dress reviews by the extremely rich (e.g., nobles and kings) and not for battle.
- * Stirrups and spurs are used by cavalry units of some cultures. Their use is considered relatively commonplace, though the lack of such impose a -1D penalty on all action rolls made while mounted.
- * Rudimentary road-working techniques are known by those cultures either advanced enough to have developed them or those directly influenced by the Tårn. Advanced roadways are made to accommodate the width of a Tårnic chariot (by de facto standard) and made of fitted stone bricks or flagstone. Lesser quality roadways are of variable width and made of loose stone. Poor quality roads are simply earthen ruts of varying width; these conduits become treacherous during periods of heavy rainfall and winter thaws.
- * Coin minting is embraced by only the most advanced cultures. Other societies who value precious metals tend to fashion ingots into trade bars or simply use crudely refined ore with value based on gross weight. In some cultures, rare shells or even sprigs of rare herbs are used as a means of economic exchange.
- * Crossbows and composite bows exist; they are assumed to have seen their first use by the Tårn and the Percians, respectively.

- * Most pole arms, including the pike, may be found. A better description of those pole arms available is located in Section 6.3 of the Jabberwocky FRPG rulebook.
- * Paper exists, but is quite rare, and thus reserved for only the very rich. As a substitute, most writing is committed to parchment. Writings of great import, or those destined for some degree of permanence are scribed on vellum.
- * Goods made of silk are extremely rare, not for lack of manufacture, but rather because it is exported by only one culture in the world--the Nippon, who generally shun outsiders.
- * Gunpowder or firearms of any sort are *not* available.

ÆRCHELON REGIONS AND PEOPLES

- * Ældûn Empire:
 - * Temperate climate; European Mediaeval archetype (Briton); Steel Age technology
 - * Northern Ærachelon regional map; North to Bedwyn Hills, West to Ferric Hills, South to Corlay, East to Mercia (East-Spur)
 - * Feudal economy; kingdoms of Ældûn, Baeleron, Corlay, Esonia, and Manaðeren

The Ældûn Empire, also known collectively as the Northern Realms (together with the Seven Shires of Markhaven, Ilithar, Ru'a Teledaïn, and Malkir), is the largest organised body of civilisation in northern Ærachelon. As noted, the Empire is composed of the individual kingdoms of Ældûn, Baeleron, Corlay, and Manaðeren. Esonia, while formally a kingdom of the Empire, currently hosts an organised resistance in a bid for independence from the Opal Throne of Dûnmoor.

OVERVIEW

- * Ældûn is the capital of the Empire, ruled from the Opal Throne in Dûnmoor. Enjoys tribute from Baeleron, Corlay, and Manaðeren through the kings of those countries. Principal industry is agriculture. Ruling hierarchy composed of Emperor at top, with land-holding nobles who occupy various offices directly underneath. These nobles are responsible for fielding soldiers in the Bright Helms, the Emperor's Army, in which they serve as leaders.

The region is akin to mediaeval Briton (c. late 5th century), and the Emperor of Ældûn enjoys peaceful relations with his kingdoms (save for Esonia, q.v.). The Seven Shires of Markhaven (west of the Ferric Hills) pay limited tribute to Ældûn but is under no feudal obligation to the Opal Throne (payment is made as insurance of martial assistance against the humanoid of the Ferric Hills and the area north of the Dusk Sea).

FEATURE: Dûnmoor is supporting a covert rebel army in the Seven Shires in a bid for annexation. A key element is control of Markhaven, and several agents are located in that free city.

- * Baeleron is the northern-most kingdom of the Ældûn Empire and is similar to mediaeval Briton. Its chief industry is agriculture, with some mining operations in the Bedwyn Hills to the north. It does maintain a standing militia led by provincial lords; the principal task of this body is to defend (and sometimes antagonise) the warlords of the Bandit Fiefs (q.v.) to the north, who are known to make forays into the Baeleric countryside. Of late, Baeleron has been sending armed troops into Esonia, which has recently declared its intention to pursue its independence of the Opal Throne of Dûnmoor. Baeleron is ruled from the relatively modern city of Dûlain.

FEATURE: Dûlain has a tenuous ally in the form of a Hill Dragon that dwells in the Bedwyn Hills. The dragon's name is Aurtorix, and he is the self-styled "ruler" of the Bedwyn Hills; he deals through proxies with both Dûlain and Exton in the Bandit Fiefs. His goal is principally to gain wealth which will be used to fund a "nation" of sorts in the Bedwyns, though none of "allies" know of his true dragon form.

- * Corlay is the southern most kingdom of the Ældûn Empire, ruled from the port city of Telmene and founded on both agricultural and merchantile industries. As the southern ward of the Empire, it constantly wars with Nadoria, which continuously

contests its north-western borders. The sites of most open battles occur in the disputed land south of the Corflow River and north of the Plainwash River. The former body marks the established southern border of Corlay (indeed, the Ældûn Empire), while the latter is the established northern border of Nadoria.

While Corlay is a stout supporter of the Opal Throne, its culture is not entirely congruent with the rest of the Empire. Instead, it may be considered similar to Norman France of the early 10th century (albeit placed within the context of Ærchus' 5th century genre).

FEATURE:

- * Esonia is a fertile kingdom along the north-eastern borders of the Ældûn Empire, populated by a people similar in many ways to the mediaeval Scots and whose culture is greatly defined by clan and family loyalties. Esonia is currently a land divided, with those loyal to Dûnmoor (Opalans) holding a tenuous grip on rulership from the castle-town of Caelborn. A strong resistance movement, factionally known as anti-Opalans, has arisen to oust the current rulership, which is viewed as harsh and oppressive. Great mistrust of each other has siezed both sides of the conflict, and open violence has plagued the region for the last generation. The anti-Opalans, known commonly as Highlanders, are granted aid by the Weavers (q.v.), who openly disapprove of the repressive tendencies of Caelborn's leadership. The current ruling family of Serinthe has mounted several clandestine efforts to oust the dissidents from the Entwood, but has thus far been unsuccessful (and it is rumoured that members of the Hill Chargers--the King's Army--shelters members of the rebellious faction).

FEATURE:

- * Manaðeren is the eastern-most kingdom of the Ældûn Empire, and despite its rich agricultural tradition, the region has a strong reputation for fierce warriors. The Blades of the East, as the King's Army is known, frequently defend their borders from the Mercian raiders dwelling within the East-Spur. The kingdom itself is similar to mediaeval Briton, and the culture is similar to that of the Angles. Manaðeren is ruled from its capital city of Manaðer, the largest sea-port in Northern Ærchelon. Through this port, the kingdom conducts lucrative trade with both the men of Corlay (via Telmene) and the Aramishi based on the Barrier Isle to the south-east.

FEATURE:

- * Bandit Fiefs:
 - * Temperate clime; European Dark Ages archetype (Scottish); Steel Age technology
 - * Northern Ærchelon regional map; North to Malkîr Plains, West to Ru'a'Teledaîn, South to Bedwyn Hills, East to Hyborian Channel
 - * Loose republic; small regions ruled by petty warlords

OVERVIEW

- * The Bandit Fiefs are aptly named, since the region thus defined is known as the gateway to the Lawless North. The land is carved into a loose amalgamation of provincial areas, each ruled over by a clanish warlord. These chieftains constantly squabble amongst themselves; only once in the region's 100 year history has a strong leader galvanised the warlords into a cohesive body.

The largest and most powerful provinces are separately ruled from fortified keeps or towers, individually known as Exton, Narcross, Ornthâr, and Molfar. A fifth stronghold exists, Deliar, but is so far north into the Malkîr Plains as to play little part in the affairs of the Fiefs as a whole. When not fighting with each other, the warlords of the Fiefs conduct raids into Baeleron, Esonia, Ru'a'Teledaîn, and even the orc-infested stretches of the Malkîr Plains. It is suspected, however, that raids into Esonia are staged efforts designed to cover the aid some chieftains grant to the Highlanders of Esonia.

The Bandit Fiefs remains a violent nuisance to each of its neighbours, and, despite several attempts by the Ældûn Empire to subjugate the region, the clan chieftains of the area remain wholly autonomous.

FEATURE:

* Frisia:

- * Sub-arctic climate; Northern Barbaric archetype (Jutes); Iron Age technology
- * Northern Ærchel on regional map; land surrounding the Bay of Firsii, east to the Vapour Peaks
- * Tribal; clans led by chieftains under a Great Chief

OVERVIEW

- * Frisia is an uncompromising land of cold, snow, and ice, buffeted by icy winds and surrounded by frigid waters or equally freezing mountainous terrain.

In defiance of these harsh conditions dwell the Frisians, a common mannish race of hardy barbarians. These peoples have lived and died along the shores of the Bay of Firsii for hundreds of years, possibly pre-dating the founding of the Ældûn Empire. As popular scholarly theory suggests, the Frisians are descended from explorers or raiders who, originally from Aquitaine, somehow found themselves on the Ærchel on continent.

The Frisians live by fishing and whaling; base agricultural techniques provide a modicum of grain, and these peoples are sufficiently advanced so as to store enough food to sustain themselves throughout the unrelenting winters common to this land. Society is comprised of numerous clans, each dedicated to one of several animal totems (veneration of various Beast Lords comprise the religious dogma of the Frisians).

The people of Frisia are largely peaceful, though they have had occasion to war with the humanoids of the the Vapour Peaks and the Shadow Peak Range. To this end, they have formed an honourable alliance with the dwarves of Azul-dûr, but this partnership extends to martial affairs only. As a result of the danger posed by raiding humanoid bands, Frisian settlements are often walled or built with stone quarried from the nearby ranges.

The "capital" of Frisia is Tomish (Frisian: "Smoke-hole), a hilltop village actually built within the crater of a dormant volcano. Noticeable rumblings emanate from this body on a regular basis, and earthquakes of some force do impact the region on an infrequent and irregular basis. This seismic activity is attributed by the Frisians to the restlessness of the Earth Father (an Earth Elemental lord who is thought to hold sway over all Beast Lords worshipped by the various clans; only members of the Great Chief's clan may enter the priesthood of the Earth Father). The walled settlement of Tomish itself constantly vents smoke and vapour from the volcano's bowels, the measure of which is seen as an indication of the Earth Father's current favour with the Frisian people.

The Frisians speak a language known to scholars--predictably--as Frisian, but called the Cold Tongue by the Frisians themselves. The ranges of Earin Head are held sacred by the Frisians as the Moors of the Passed, and numerous dolmens populate this bleak landscape--all tomb markers of Great Chiefs who have passed on to the Earth Father's Court.

FEATURE: The dormant volcano that supports Tomish contains no few entrances into the Underworld, and the Earth Elementalists of the Great Chief's clan know of a portal under the volcano that leads to the Elemental Plane of Earth.

* Jutea:

- * Sub-arctic climate; Northern Barbaric archetype (Jutes); Steel Age technology
- * Northern Ærchel on regional map; valley between of Agammemnor's Fingers
- * Tribal; clans led by Council of Chieftains

OVERVIEW

- * Jutea is a bitterly cold and snowy land, unadorned by any land of any sort. Nestled between the icy peaks of Agammemnor's Fingers, Jutea is populated by a fierce, but somewhat advanced, barbarian people known as the Jutes.

Jutea is ruled from the walled town of Baln, which lies on the shores of the Hyborian Channel. From this place, the Council

of Chieftains rule over the whole of their land and its people and even engage in some trade with lands to the south. Most of Jutean commerce, however, is trafficked with Gael-dûr and Malkîr. The principle industries of the Jutes are fine metalcraft, precious stones from the rich mines of Agammemnor's Fingers, and quarrying. These people dwell in scattered clannish villages, each spread far enough apart so as not to compete for the sparse resources yielded by the land. Sustenance is gained principally through hunting, though some (small) portions of their diet come from livestock and (even smaller) miniscule farms such as may be tended in these cold reaches.

The Jutes can lay claim to kinship with the Frisians, who are their apparent forebears, but little about their modern society is congruent with their more isolated cousins west of the Vapour Peaks. The Jutes are warlike, a condition borne of necessity, since Jutea lays quite literally within a cradle of evil, and is constantly under threat of invasion from the humanoids (or worse) that dwell within the Vapour Peaks or Ungfêl, which lies close by to the north.

The Jutes are far more cosmopolitan than typical barbarian peoples, largely due to the proximity of the normally isolationist mountain dwarves of Gael-dûr and the fierce peoples of Malkîr. Through a pact made long ago, the dwarves of Gael-dûr helped to teach the Jutes the secrets of metallurgy and forge-craft in exchange for their stout aid against Agammemnor's evil designs; were it not for the enriching contact and support of the mountain dwarves, the Jutes could have easily become pawns of the Lich King.

Unlike the animal totem worshipping Frisians, the Jutes revere a handful of deities known as the Cold Providers (Patrons of Frost, The Ice Pantheon); aspects of Cold, Conflict, Vitality, and Security are represented by appropriate immortals from the Celestiani (q.v.).

FEATURE:

* Ilithar:

- * Temperate climate; European Dark Ages archetype (Renaissance Italy); Steel Age technology
- * Northern Archelon regional map; north and east to the Dusk Sea; south to Fal'a'Duadaîn; west to Shadow Peak Range
- * Syndracy; ruled by a council of various merchant families (Orb of Commerce).

OVERVIEW

- * Ilithar is a land apart considered against the other kingdoms of the Northern Realms. Unlike its neighbours, Ilithar is ruled by council instead of monarchy, and this council is seated by nobles from various merchant families, each of which represent a particular commercial interest. The capital, Innarlith, is a cosmopolitan city of great intrigue where all non-evil races are welcome, though visitors note a strong dedication to commerce and industry; merchants and merchant guilds hold sway here to the exclusion of all other bodies.

Intrigue amongst the merchant families of Innarlith is commonplace, and while many merchants and their respective guilds are able to arbitrate their differences amicably, some problems are given to "vendetta," a socially acceptable manner of settling disputes through subterfuge and, if necessary, violence. As a result, there is a strong element of "pardoned criminality" in Ilithar and in Innarlith especially.

The richness of the nation is perhaps surprising, given its geographic position. Innarlith, however, manages to reap great economic benefits from its location on the Dusk Sea. Typically, it sends its goods across the sea to Markhaven, where they are then distributed to markets among the other Northern Realms; Innarlith clearly makes a grand profit by being the source of many goods and commodities that find their way into the neighbouring realms.

The industries of Ilithar are many: fishing and other aquatic crafts are practiced along the shores of the Dusk Sea; many mines of precious metals and stones may be found amidst the Shadow Peak Ranges; metal and jewel-craft is purchased from the hill dwarves of Otzra-tael to the south, along the Inar River. The landscape in general is dominated by farmland grouped in feudal-like economies, each lorded over by some merchant who typically dwells in Innarlith.

The nation of Ilithar maintains a standing army of professional soldiers; this condition balks the martial requirements of many nearby nations, who conscript generalist militia in times of need. Ilithar, however, is rich enough to find the funds necessary to support a standing army, and its troops--known as the Gildward--are well equipped, well trained, and universally loyal to the Orb of Commerce.

Ilithar is not necessary well liked by certain others of the Northern Realms, the Ældún Empire in particular. While it does conduct brisk business with its neighbours, Ilithar is viewed in Dúnmoor as a selfish and greedy nation. The truth of this view is somewhat hypocritical, as Dúnmoor would love greatly the annexation of this prosperous kingdom.

FEATURE:

MONSTERS AND CREATURES

- * Dragon, Forest: a type of dragon that dwells in remote woodland areas; mostly independent, they are the some-time allies of elves.
- * Dragon, Hill: a type of dragon that dwells in remote hilly areas; they are generally of selfish disposition and great enemies of dwarves.
- * Drake, Rock: (dragon-kin) a lesser dragon that dwells in low hills or rocky areas.
- * Drake, Wood: (dragon-kin) a lesser dragon that dwells in woodland areas.
- * Duskmens: corporeal automatons created by the Ebon Cabal to infiltrate areas and assassinate individuals. While completely visible, light shifts around them in such a way as to make them virtually undetectable until they are just a few feet away (DR: Very Hard (22)/PER to note less than 50' away). They are brutal combatants, generally unintelligent, but quite cunning.
- * Hierodule: an extra-planar race created by the immortal Chronos to act as servants of Time. In their natural form, hierodules resemble bipedal crab-like arthropods, with circular mouths ringed with teeth, and dark, pupilless eyes. These beings mingle with the mortal races of Ærchus, however, as they possess the ability to *Shapechange* at will for unlimited duration. While hierodules may be encountered physically, a part of their consciousness remains always on the Time-skein, a dimension of sorts that envelops the whole of the multiverse. As a result, they are aware of events in both past, present, and future, though in terms of infinite possibilities. Their mannerisms, speech, and conduct reflect this, and encounters with hierodules are frequently confusing, misleading, or simply incomprehensible (imagine a conversation in which verb tense has no meaning and in which all possible outcomes of a given scenario are clearly envisioned simultaneously).

The mission of all hierodules is to guide the actions of mortal races so that events occur in the best interest of Time's progression. This charge can result, for example, in a hierodule's encounter with a party of adventurers poised on a quest of great import--the hierodule's concern is that the actions of the party "fit" into the grand scheme of Time such that the outcome of their actions does not interfere with the occurrence of other events (all of which are inter-related and "visible" to the hierodule), and the hierodule may choose to impart information that will lead to the party's decision to act (unknowingly) in the best interest of Time's role in the multiverse's growth. That these future events cannot be envisioned by the party is inconsequential to the hierodule, who can see all possible outcomes of any choice the party makes. Nor does it matter that the actions of the party might have an effect on events a world--or plane--away, since, from Time's perspective, all events--regardless of location--are intertwined.

ORGANISATIONS AND CULTS

- * Ebon Cabal: a thoroughly evil and depraved cult whose allegiance is to none other than the Bane God. Members of the Cabal, known collectively as the Banecreed, spread terror and chaos, and the Dark Fidelity is responsible for widespread terrorism and cruelty among the civilised lands of both the

Northern Realms and the Southern Kingdoms. The Cabal's origin is thought to be Nadoria, where the Bane God's vile practices were first revealed. Perhaps strangely, the most powerful manifestation of the Ebon Cabal's presence in the world can be found far north of Nador, in the wastelands of Ungfêl. There, the Lich King Agammenor holds sway over countless hordes of humanoid rabble and other evil beings, all ostensibly poised to descend upon the Northern Realms in an uncompromised bid for domination. The affiliation of the Lich King to the Dark Fidelity is not officially confirmed, but it can be guessed at as a result of the sporadic pilgrimages made by Nadorians to Ungfêl.

- * Brightsashes: highly fundamentalist branch of the Church of the Pancreator; they perceive any transgression of the Pancreator's (literal) doctrine as allegiance with the Bane God (i. e., Banecreed, or members of the Ebon Cabal). They are known to hunt down and persecute perceived Banecreed with little or no compassion, seeking only repentance for assumed sins. As a result, they are not above torture and even execution; they are much like the Catholic Inquisitors of our own history.
- * Lictors: Properly known as the Order of Penitence and Absolution, this body is comprised of professional torturers and executioners. As a body, they are greatly feared, though individually, they view their practice as a profession like any other, without malice or cruelty (in fact, those who demonstrate sadistic tendencies are not permitted to join). Individual members are known by rank, from lowest to highest: Torturer, Inquisitor, Lictor, and Carnifex. As a guild, the Lictors are also known as the Guild of the Fuligin Habit, or, more commonly, the Torturers. These practitioners are invariably skilled in the art of pain; thankfully, they are known only in Galba, where they work as instruments of the Exaulted Overlord, The Autarch of Galba. In Galba, they are common to both large and small settlements. In the former, they deliver the justice of the Autarch; in less populous areas, where the Autarch's law holds less direct influence, they act as judge, jury, and executioner.
- * Oak Root: a terrorist organisation comprised of demi-humans who resent the rising dominance of the mannish races, which is viewed as a clear threat to demi-human society. Known only on the continent of Ærchelon, Oak Root is populated principally by dwarves and elves; halflings rarely join the ranks of Oak Root because of their typically friendly relations with humans. While the cause of Oak Root may be justified in the eyes of many demi-humans--who universally wish to protect their holdings and their culture from the rapidly encroaching sway of human influence--the organisation is officially dis-avowed in demi-human diplomatic circles. Part of the rationale for this is due to the hostilities that might evolve from its open support; a more concrete reason for this fact is Oak Root's terrorist practices. Indeed, Oak Root has claimed responsibility for kidnapping of mannish officials, subterfuge against human kingdoms, and even the wholesale destruction of entire mannish settlements. Thus, Oak Root occupies a perilous position as both an enemy to humans and a liability to those demi-humans who wish amicable relations with their mannish neighbours.
- * Weavers: a body of goodly folk unique to Ærchelon and Western Ocealea whose goal is to quell the influence of evil in any form. Their name denotes a peaceful outlook, but was chosen for their role in weaving not only their energies into the protection of the Northern Realms, but also in weaving the fabric of civilisation in the north.

The headquarters of the Weavers is unknown, but thought to be in the Ilighon Forest; they are known to operate principally in northern Ærchelon, though they are sometimes encountered in southern Ærchelon, as agents against the Ebon Cabal (q. v.).

The Weavers maintain strong ties to the welfare of the Northern Realms, as evidenced by agents in the Ældûn, Ilithar, Malkir, and, most strongly, the Seven Shires. The only requirement for membership is an abhorrence of evil, and the Weavers seem to eschew any official religious affiliations. As a result, all classes, occupations, and races are represented within their ranks. They work to protect the weak, uphold justice, and stem the tide of evil wherever it manifests--whether from rabbling humanoids, despotic rulers, or criminals within the borders they patrol.