

DOMINIONS

AGE OF ANSWERING

CAMPAIGN SETTING

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ON THE COVER

Deep in the swamps of Sauromatia, the sorceress Kirke calls forth her father, the swamp demon Mauthog. Kirke claims he is a titan imprisoned by the Sovereign after he wrested power from the Old Gods.

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INTRODUCTION

DOMINIONS IS A CAMPAIGN SETTING THAT TAKES YOU TO A time before recorded history, when the events that would become the mythologies of our ancients were not just stories, but living reality. This is the age from which our neolithic and bronze age ancestors drew their tales of gods and monsters, heroes and tyrants – stories that have echoed through millennia, growing distorted in the telling but never losing their essential truths. The myths may not have gotten all (or even most) of the details right, but they preserve the memory of a time when the world operated according to very different rules.

In this regard, Dominions has more in common with the Thurian Age of Kull the Conqueror or his Hyborian Age of Conan the Barbarian than with the high fantasy worlds that dominate modern gaming. This is a world of dark sword and sorcery, where magic and fantastic creatures are undeniably real, but the fundamental laws governing the universe remain poorly understood even by those who wield supernatural power.

Horrors from the stars and deities of ancient power exist and even walk among men, but where these things came from or to whom they answer, if anyone, is still unknown. Things simply *are*, and mortals try to eke out survival in the world they find themselves in. Unlike the arcane universities of many campaign worlds, a civilization upon which to rest long enough to study the deep mysteries of the universe is a luxury the scholars of this world rarely possess.

Civilization exists, of course, but it is neither advanced nor well-organized by modern standards, and practices that later ages might consider abhorrent such as slavery and human sacrifice are commonplace throughout much of the world. What we would call nations are often little more than colored regions on a map that nobody controls, while true power resides in city-states, tribal confederations, and the personal domains of god-kings whose authority stems from supernatural might rather than political sophistication. Beyond eyesight of your city's walls you are very vulnerable and very alone.

The wild lands are truly wild – vast expanses where civilized law holds no sway and ancient things still roam freely. Even the greatest civilizations of the day are islands of flickering light in an ocean of primordial darkness, constantly struggling against forces that predate mortal understanding.

THE DIVINE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Dominions differs from most fantasy campaign settings in that it has a global-scale, strongly theocratic political structure. The world is carved up into domains corresponding to rising gods – proto-deities whose power waxes and wanes with follower devotion. These are not distant, abstract divine figures but active participants in worldly affairs whose supernatural influence can reshape the very landscape of their territories.

Civilization exists as the temporal expression of its patron deity's essential nature. A war god's realm might be a martial confederation where strength determines status and

all citizens train to fight. An earth goddess's land could be an agricultural paradise with supernatural seasons and miraculous harvests. A death god's domain might be a necropolis-kingdom where living serve honored ancestors and necromancy is revered as sacred practice.

The diversity of divine patrons means that practices considered abhorrent in one nation might be central religious observances in another. Entire civilizations built around blood sacrifice offer still-beating hearts to sun gods who demand such tribute for their continued blessings. Clans of sorcerers who trace their lineage back to ancient pacts with otherworldly entities practice summoning rituals that bring demons, elementals, and stranger things into the material world as servants or advisors. Nations ruled by death-gods maintain vast slave populations not merely for labor but as a renewable resource for necromantic rituals that strengthen the realm's supernatural defenses.

The power of these rising gods is directly tied to the worship they receive from mortal followers. This makes heresy and apostasy existential threats to national survival, not mere theological concerns. A god whose worshippers abandon faith grows weaker, leaving lands vulnerable to conquest by rivals with stronger patrons. Religious orthodoxy is maintained ruthlessly, and foreign missionaries are treated as enemy agents in supernatural warfare.

Within a nation, spiritual power is rarely shared, and deities with different aspects are more common than true pantheons. These awakening gods are extraordinarily powerful but not omniscient or omnipotent. Most seek absolute rule over their people, but achieving that is another matter entirely. Their divinity comes from worship, creating delicate balance where excessive interference alienates faithful while neglect allows rival influences. Many unruly races produce deities walking a fine line between divine authority and mortal devotion. A god who micromanages every aspect of governance might find their followers abandoning them for a more hands-off patron or one who better aligns with their race's natural inclinations, while one who ignores mortal affairs entirely risks seeing their domain crumble through neglect. Infighting among mortal factions vying for divine favor is as common as it has always been in history, with competing priests, nobles, and generals all claiming to best understand their god's will.

The divine political structure has profound implications for party composition and campaign dynamics. While traditional fantasy adventures might bring together heroes from across the known world, such cosmopolitan cooperation is much less common in the world of Dominions. Characters from different nations typically serve competing gods whose fundamental natures may be utterly incompatible. A warrior sworn to a deity of honor cannot easily cooperate with a rogue devoted to a god of shadows, not merely because of personality conflicts but because their patron powers actively oppose each other both politically and on a cosmic level.

Instead, most adventures assume that player characters originate from the same nation or allied territories, sharing common religious and cultural backgrounds that provide natural reasons for cooperation. This creates party dynamics more reminiscent of Greek mythological tales, where heroes united by shared cultural identity face challenges that test their collective loyalty to homeland and gods rather than their ability to overcome personal differences through friendship.

This doesn't mean gaming groups are forbidden from creating more diverse parties – creative players and game masters can certainly devise scenarios that bring together characters from opposing nations. Diplomatic missions, temporary ceasefires, or threats so catastrophic that ancient enemies must unite all provide opportunities for cross-national cooperation. However, the setting assumes such cooperation is exceptional rather than routine, and the social, religious, and political tensions such arrangements would create should form a significant part of the campaign's dramatic tension. Players might find themselves torn between personal bonds and divine loyalty, or struggling to complete objectives while their patron gods work at cross-purposes.

When such alliances do occur between nations serving different gods, they are most often temporary arrangements – non-aggression pacts or military alliances formed to address shared threats or wage war against a common enemy. These partnerships allow allied nations to focus their forces on external campaigns with reduced (though never entirely absent) fear of attack while their soldiers are deployed in foreign lands. Even these pragmatic alliances remain fragile, as the fundamental incompatibilities between different divine patrons ensure that cooperation can never be entirely trusted or taken for granted.

A WORLD WITHOUT COSMIC MORALITY

Another distinguishing aspect of Dominions is the complete absence of cosmic morality. There is no universal definition of good and evil, no cosmic force that judges actions according to an absolute moral standard. The concepts of "good" and "evil" as they exist in this world are purely relative – *good* means nothing more than "beneficial to me and mine", while *evil* simply represents "harmful to my interests".

When ancient texts speak of "great evils" or "terrible darkness", they are not describing entities that violate some universal moral law, but rather powers that are considered hostile by the civilizations doing the describing. An "ancient evil" is called such because it is presumed to be dangerous

or harmful, not because it has been judged by the universe and found wanting. Even when all civilized peoples unite in calling something evil, it's not because the entity violates objective moral principles, but because it represents a threat so universal that it has no allies among mortal races.

This relativistic approach to morality means that practices which some societies condemn as evil – slavery, ritual sacrifice, trafficking with demons – might be perfectly acceptable or even sacred duties in others. A kingdom that builds its prosperity on the backs of enslaved populations might be reviled by neighboring realms, but from the perspective of an uncaring universe, slavery is simply another social institution, no more inherently evil than taxation or military service. Sorcerers who summon otherworldly entities to serve their purposes might be hunted as dangerous cultists in one land while being honored as wise counselors in another.

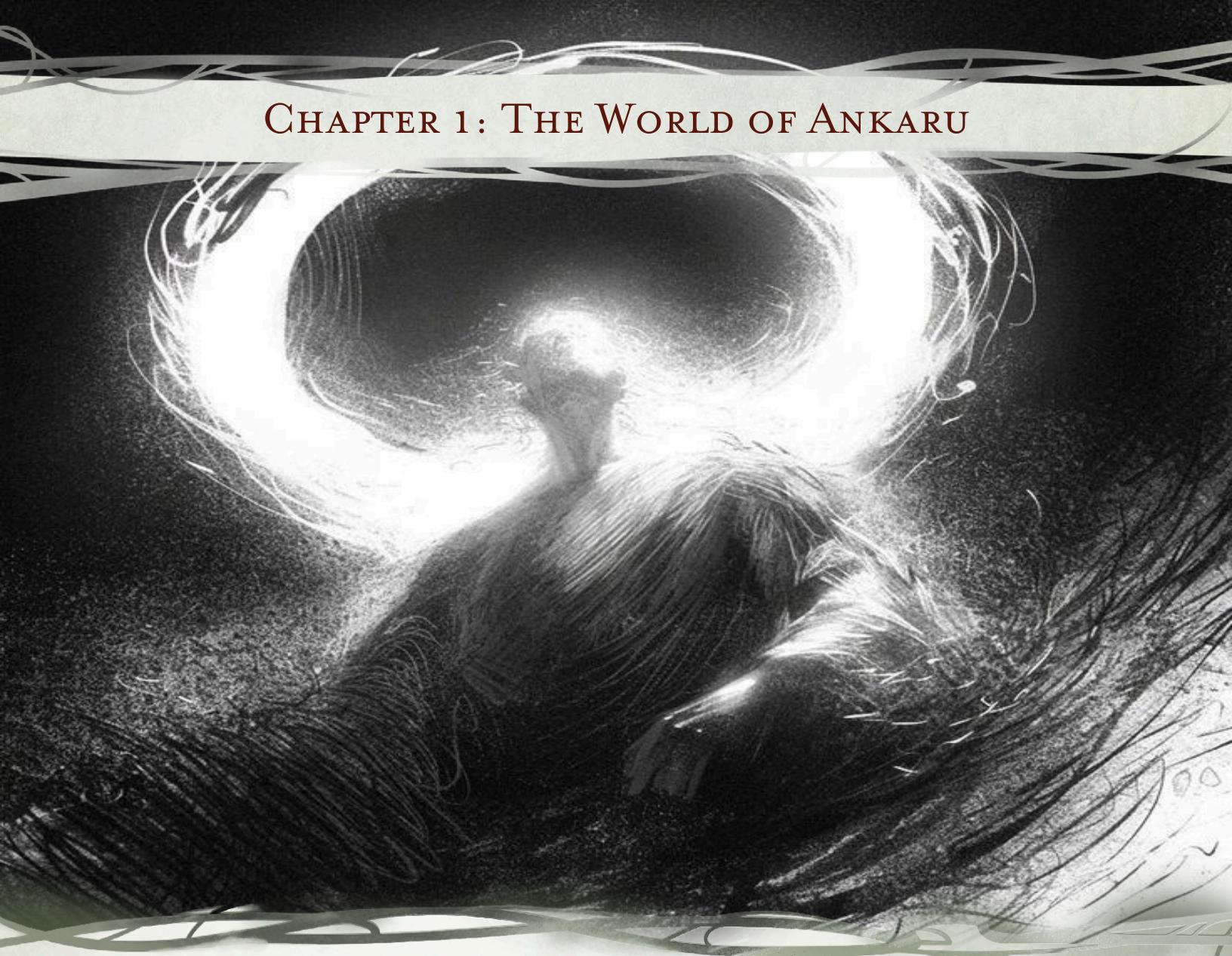
Law and Chaos, by contrast, are very real forces in this world – they represent fundamental principles of organization versus entropy, order versus turmoil. These forces shape the very fabric of reality and influence the nature of magic, divine power, and the stability of existence itself. A god of Law might demand rigid hierarchies, absolute obedience to divine will, and the preservation of established order at all costs. A god of Chaos might revel in change, revolution, and the constant overthrow of established patterns. Neither approach is inherently good or evil. They are simply different methods of organizing reality.

Even during the Age of the Throne, when cosmic order reached its apex and there was but one God, universal morality did not exist. The races of the world committed acts both terrible and virtuous, and different peoples and cultures believed in organizing their societies around different principles.

In practical terms, this creates a world where might makes right and where the only true measure of success is survival and the achievement of one's goals. The gods themselves embody this principle – they are not moral exemplars but powerful entities pursuing their own agendas, and mortals serve them not because they are "good" but because they offer protection, power, and purpose in an otherwise indifferent universe.

How you treat others will, of course, be a factor in how they treat you in return and what kind of people you'll find surrounding you. The lack of a universal measuring stick doesn't mean people and deities good by modern standards don't exist.

CHAPTER 1: THE WORLD OF ANKARU



O

RANYTH. ELARION. THAL'ZARUN. THE WORLD HAS MANY names in many languages spoken by the races of the age, but the name used most often by scholars regardless of location is the one engraved into the earliest known writing: *Ankaru*.

Ankaru is a world of stone and bronze, where vast wilderness stretches between scattered settlements and the works of mortal hands remain small against the enormity of untamed nature. The few cities that exist cluster around natural harbors or fertile river valleys, their walls of cyclopean stone rising like defiant monuments against a landscape that contains more corpses of dead civilizations than yet live.

Beyond these fragile bastions of civilization, the world belongs to older inhabitants – dire wolves that hunt in packs a hundred strong, bears the size of houses, and stranger things that leave no tracks but can be heard calling to each other on nights when the moons are dark. This is an age when a single storm can wash away the accumulated works of generations, and when the distance between any two

settlements might conceal ruins left by peoples whose very names have been forgotten by all save the stones themselves.

But it was not always this way. Before the current age, there were other ages where civilization held more sway and order reigned over chaos.

RECORDED HISTORY

Much has been lost since the height of civilization, but a few of the recent ages are still remembered by those alive today. Indeed, some individuals of long-lived races have seen them all. What happened before this is unknown, though every culture has its own tales. Below is a description of what is known broadly in all cultures, even if only by their scholars.

THE AGE OF THE THRONE

For millennia, one being held absolute dominion over all creation – Urùn the Enthroned, the Sovereign.

This was not merely political rule, but cosmic authority – the divine will that shaped reality itself. Urùn served as the supreme arbiter of natural law, the source of magic, and the final authority on matters of life, death, and the fundamental forces that bound the world together.

Under his rule, the world knew order. Magic flowed in predictable patterns, channeled through established hierarchies of priests and mages. The seasons turned in their proper cycles, the dead remained properly dead, and the barriers between mortal realm and the otherworlds held firm. Nations rose and fell, but always within the cosmic framework established by divine will.

CIVILIZATION FLOURISHES

This order allowed civilization to expand. Great works were built, new creations were forged, and nations expanded. Larger and larger territories were more meaningfully claimed by political powers, and while that meant greater and greater wars were fought and defeated peoples had further to fall, the tides were in favor of continued growth. The wealth and stability allowed scholars to form orders and begin to study the inner workings of magic and the natural world.

Over time the worship of the old gods faded for they were silent while Urùn answered all prayers. His various religious sects often spanned nations and had political wills of their own.

THE AGE OF SILENCE

Eight hundred and twelve years have passed since the world last heard the voice of its god. The One Who Rules All vanished without warning, word, or sign, leaving behind a creation suddenly bereft of divine guidance. Where once prayers were answered and miracles flowed like water, now there was only silence. The faithful knelt before cold altars, their words echoing in empty temples, their offerings growing stale before indifferent idols.

The Age of Silence had begun, the era when mortals were forced to learn to live without the certainty of divine presence. Even the eldest giants, who witnessed the final days of divine rule in their youth, now speak of the this era as distant memories. The deep kingdoms have carved new halls in mountains that no longer echo with divine blessing. Dragons who once dealt directly with Urùn have retreated to their hoards, waiting for signs that may never come. For men and the younger races, there is no memory of the time before.

In the ethereal realm that overlays the material world, ancient sites of power that once served as connection points to divine authority now stood empty and cold. These places – grand temples, naural phenomena touched by godhood, artifacts that once channeled divine will – remained physically intact but spiritually hollow. Pilgrims journeyed to these sites hoping for signs of their god's return, but found only echoes of former glory.

The most learned priests and scholars debated endlessly about their god's fate. Some maintained faith that the Sovereign would return when the world proves itself worthy. Others suggested their deity had ascended to a

higher plane of existence beyond mortal comprehension. A few whispered darker theories – that Urùn was destroyed by some cosmic catastrophe, or chose to abandon a creation that had disappointed divine expectations.

THE WORLD IN CRISIS

When the Sovereign vanished, the effects were not immediately apparent. For the first few decades, many assumed their god was simply distant, testing the faithful or attending to divine matters beyond mortal comprehension. Priests continued their rituals, mages practiced their arts, and rulers governed as they always had.

But the signs could not be ignored forever. Prayers that had always been answered fell on deaf ears. Divine magic began to falter, leaving priests struggling to heal the sick or bless the crops. The carefully maintained barriers between worlds started to weaken, allowing strange influences to seep through. Most disturbing of all, the natural order itself began to show cracks – weather patterns shifted without reason, the undead grew restless in their graves, and creatures of myth began to walk openly in lands where they had been banished for centuries.

For seven centuries and more, the world had endured this chaos. The old clergy, stripped of their divine connection, clung desperately to power through ritual and tradition alone. Many were swept aside by popular uprisings or simply abandoned by their faithless flocks. In the growing darkness, desperate peoples began to remember older ways – the primal gods their ancestors had worshipped before Urùn's dominion. Ancient altars, long buried beneath temples to the supreme deity, were unearthed. Forgotten names were whispered in sacred groves and hidden caves.

The Old Gods – storm-wreathed titans of wind and lightning, earth-mothers who demanded blood sacrifice, serpentine deities of wisdom and poison, shadow-lords who ruled over death and dreams – these primordial powers had slumbered beneath the Enthroned One's cosmic order for millennia. Now, in desperation, mortals called out to them once more.

MAGIC IN CHAOS

Perhaps nowhere was the Sovereign's absence more keenly felt than in the realm of magic iteslf. What was once a stable, hierarchical system fluctuated wildly and unpredictable for over two centuries. Spells failed without warning, while other incantations produced catastrophic effects far beyond their caster's intentions.

The very elements seemed to rebel against mortal control – flames consumed those who sought to command them, earth swallowed would-be shapers whole, and winds carried away those who dared invoke their power.

The magical academies spoke of “the Unraveling” – the slow dissolution of the cosmic framework that once governed supernatural forces. Ancient grimoires became unreliable, their formulae as likely to kill their users as achieve the desired effect. Masters of the art found themselves reduced to frightened students, while apprentices sometimes manifested powers that should have taken lifetimes to develop, often at the cost of their sanity or their lives.



Titans imprisoned by Urùn in ages past are rediscovered.

THE DEAD GROW BOLD

Death, once an absolute threshold overseen directly by divine will, became negotiable during the dark centuries of the Age of Silence. The recently deceased lingered as ghosts when they should have passed on, while ancient undead stirred in tombs that had been sealed by Urùn’s own power. Necromancers, once carefully controlled by divine prohibition, found their arts terrifyingly effective. Death itself seemed confused without clear instructions from above, unsure of whom to claim and whom to spare.

In the crypts beneath the great temples, priests performed desperate rites and burned offerings of ever-increasing value, not from devotion but from naked terror. They knew that their god’s protective seal on the underworld grew weaker each day, and they feared what might emerge when it finally shattered completely.

THE AGE OF ANSWERING

Thirty-five years ago, on a night when the three moons hung full in the sky and the aurora blazed with unnatural colors, something unprecedented occurred – prayers were answered. Not the desperate pleas directed toward the empty throne of the vanished Sovereign, but the ancient invocations spoken to the Old Gods in hidden groves and forgotten shrines.

THE NEW VOICES

In the frost-bound northlands, a dying priestess of the Storm-Father called down lightning to shatter the ice that trapped her village. A blood-priest of the Bone Mother raised warriors from their graves to defend a besieged city, while a devotee of the Serpent of Wisdom cured a plague that had baffled physicians for decades.

At the same time, the wild magic that had plagued the world since the Age of Silence began to quiet, settling into new patterns that, while different from the old ways, proved learned and controllable. Scholars debate what caused this stabilization, but none can deny its reality – sorcery once again became a craft rather than a gamble with death.

This new age goes by many names in many lands, for the world is too fragmented to share names and languages. But each of them, separately, understands that the Age of Silence had ended. Only the mad and the foolishly faithful still direct their prayers to the absent throne. The rest of the world has learned to petition powers that, while alien and often terrible, at least respond to mortal supplication.

THE OLD CLERGY’S DOOM

The transition from the Age of Silence to the Age of Answering proved catastrophic for what little remained of the old religious hierarchy. Priesthoods who had maintained their positions through political influence and empty ritual found themselves confronted by upstart cultists who could perform genuine miracles. Temple treasures that had grown fat during centuries of unanswered prayers were raided by mobs seeking to fund shrines to gods who actually responded to their devotions.

In some regions, the old clergy attempted to maintain power through force of arms and political alliances. These efforts invariably ended in bloodshed and horror.

The new powers that answered prayers showed no mercy towards those who opposed their worship, and their faithful proved utterly ruthless in sweeping aside the representatives of the failed old order. Temples burned, hierarchs were torn apart by mobs, and sacred relics were desecrated or repurposed for new and alien rituals.

Only the occasional madman still venerates the Sovereign, usually a broken priest who refuses to accept that his god has abandoned the world. These pitiable figures are sometimes tolerated as harmless lunatics, their ravings dismissed as the products of minds shattered by centuries of unanswered prayers. Sometimes, however, their words carry disturbing hints of hidden knowledge, suggesting they may know more about their absent deity's fate than their fractured sanity allows them to articulate clearly.

Those in power will always fight to keep it, however, and many ruins are housing villages or more led by exiles of previously powerful positions that have formed as a result of the infighting, some seeking to rebuild but others consumed by the need for vengeance against their usurpers.

THE AWAKENED ONES

As prayers to the Old Gods began receiving answers, another phenomenon manifested across the world – the rise of beings whose personal power transcends mortal limitations. These entities, known by various names in different lands (Awakened Ones, the Touched, God-Marked, Ascendant Souls, Pretender Gods), display abilities that seem to reshape reality through will alone.

Some appear to be ancient entities who once served Urùn directly and now carry fragments of cosmic authority within their essence. Others are as mortals whose legendary powers have elevated them beyond the constraints of flesh. Others are titans released from eons of imprisonment. The strangest among them seem to be primordial forces given consciousness – embodiments of primal concepts like War, Plague, or Winter made manifest in forms that mortal minds can barely comprehend or animating a worshipped object.

What unites these emerging powers is their ability to impose their essential nature upon the world around them. Their mere presence warps reality in ways that persist long after their departure, creating domains where their will becomes natural law. A being touched by the essence of Fire might cause eternal summer to reign in their chosen lands, while one marked by Death brings withering and decay to all they survey.

It was these awakening beings who were answering the people's prayers. Even the new beings of power not worshipped in the past, such as powerful sorcerers,

THE NEW FAITHFUL

The common people, faced with the stark choice between gods who answer prayers and gods who remain silent, have largely embraced the Awakened Ones with the fervor of the desperate. Ancient names once forbidden or forgotten are now chanted openly in marketplaces and throne rooms alike. The Storm-Father's eagles soar above merchant caravans that carry his protective talismans. The Earth-Mother's sacred groves bloom in temple courtyards where

once only the Sovereign's symbols were permitted. The Plague-Bringer's yellow signs mark healers' houses, for even disease gods answer the prayers of physicians who seek to understand their enemy's nature.

Yet this return to the old ways brings its own terrors. The Old Gods are not always benevolent shepherds like Urùn once claimed to be. Many are primal forces of nature given consciousness and will – beautiful and terrible, creative and destructive, wise and utterly alien to mortal concerns. Their worship demands sacrifice, risk, and the constant awareness that divine favor can turn to wrath without warning or apparent reason.

Nonetheless, desperate times breed desperate measures. A farmer whose crops wither in cursed soil will gladly offer blood to the Bone-Lord if it means his children will not starve. A merchant whose ships are beset by supernatural storms will burn precious cargo on the Storm-Father's altars if it ensures safe passage. A plague-wracked city will embrace the Serpent of Poison's mysteries if they offer even a chance of survival.

The learned debate whether these new religious movements represent genuine spiritual revival or mere pragmatic desperation. The distinction matters little to the faithful, who know only that their prayers are answered and their gods, however terrible, are real and present in ways the absent Enthroned One never was again after his disappearance.

What is clear and certain to all is that these beings of power brook no heresy nor apostasy. What happens when two competing deities return or rise amongst the same people is still a question for the Age.

DAILY LIFE IN ANKARU

Ankaru has always been a land of war between cultures, as many of the elder races have long lives and longer memories. But Urùn's rule over all allowed for a neutral clergy that spanned these chasms and a flourishing of trade that gave rise to greater contact between peoples.

Eight hundred years later, much of what civilization gained has been lost to the wild, but the core of measures and terminologies remain the same. In many cases there are also local alternatives, but awareness and understanding of these is widespread.

THE THREE MOONS

Three moons hang in the sky above Ankaru. In addition to their common name, each of the moons has a variety of common epithets as well as a whole host of cultural names.

Auriel, the innermost the smallest of the moons,

appears regularly on a weekly cycle. It shines more than Midras, but due to its size it is overall dimmer. It always shines white, even when Midras changes colors.

It appears regularly on a monthly cycle. It nearly always shines white, like Auriel, but on rare occasion it will shine in shades of red, orange, and on very rare occasion blue or green. Curiously, ancient scholars noticed that the tides seem to follow the same cycles as Midras while being unaffected by the other moons, so Midras is often associated with water magic and the seas.

Noctis, the presumed outermost moon, is by far the strangest of the three. It doesn't seem to follow a discernable pattern of arrival at all, and sometimes appears larger or smaller than it did before (though never smaller than Auriel and never larger than Midras). It is so dim that any color is hard to pinpoint, but it is most likely either deep purple or black. Often it's easier to discern its presence by the disc-shaped absence of stars than by seeing it directly. In many cultures, Noctis is associated with death and blood magic.

Conjunctions and alignments have cultural significance in most places, but whether or not those have any real validity in the physical or spiritual worlds is unknown.

TIME

The peoples of Ankaru mark the passage of time according to the standards developed by the clergy of Urùn. Days are 24 hours long, divided into day and night. Seven days make up a week, four weeks a month, and twelve months a year. The four seasons are each three months, and a year is twelve months. Most cultures use their own calendar in line with their local seasons, but the standard calendar begins at the start of winter.

Days of the Week

First Day	Sul	Fifth Day	Zor
Second Day	Mod	Sixth Day	Far
Third Day	Zol	Seventh Day	Sar
Fourth Day	Wir		

Months of the Year

Month	Season (mid-latitude)
Grimhol	Early winter
Zalthys	Mid-winter
Ashkent	Late winter
Korven	Early spring
Sylvara	Mid-spring
Thaelon	Late spring
Solmyr	Early summer
Scoriak	Mid-summer
Abundor	Late summer
Bronmyr	Early autumn
Shaedel	Mid-autumn
Vult	Late autumn

The entire world shares a few significant events. A few centuries ago the common calendar switched to using the beginning of the Age of Silence to mark the first year. Many starting points making sense for telling stories with your

campagins, but this campaign setting guide assumes it is the year 812 – thirty five years after the Age of Answering began.



The moons of Ankaru above the Kalazad desert. Noctis is particularly large this cycle, concerning the shamans of Urùn.

LANGUAGE

No common tongue has ever emerged to unite the myriad peoples under a single linguistic banner. Even during the Age of the Throne this never happened, as the clergy believed that Urùn wanted cultures to come and go as they would, albeit from within his orderly physical realm. To promote this, the clergy themselves used different languages and hired local translators to help them communicate if they had need to travel widely.

As such, the world remains a patchwork of distinct languages, each tied to ancient bloodlines long since forgotten to time. Despite this fragmentation, astute travelers have noted that certain language families share common roots, allowing for rudimentary

communication between related peoples. Teh Vanir realms of Helheim and Vanheim, for instance, can manage basic trade negotiations through their shared linguistic heritage, though complex diplomatic discussions remain beyond such simple exchanges. This limited mutual intelligibility has given rise to a thriving profession of interpreters and translators, who command premium prices for their services. Due to the collapse of civilization during the Age of Silence merchant caravans rarely venture beyond their homelands at all, but when they do it's almost never without at least one polyglot guide.

TRAVEL

Few roads still exist beyond the immediate countryside supporting a city. Much of what was once built has been buried or lost as the civilization supporting the infrastructure waned. Areas with arid weather and limited seasons have fared better, and ancient but functioning roads can be found in deserts and arid steppes more often than in other areas.

For everyone else, the current solution is to travel on foot or to use mounts suited to the conditions. Elves and horses are popular amongst humans, but some peoples ride lizards, elephants, or other strange beasts. Wagons broadly exist and are used heavily in farm-to-market transit, but for anything further afield pack animals are a safer bet. A few civilizations use the chariot, but almost always exclusively for war.

FOOD AND FARMING

Lack of access to food and clean water is a significant cause of the decline in the past several centuries. Each inhabitant of a city not providing their own food requires about 1.5 acres of land for true food security, so the amount of land that needs to be held to feed a city is difficult to manage in a world with ancient beasts, bandits, and evil sorcerers skulking about. As a result, farmed food is incredibly expensive due the amount of military strength required to maintain farms. Control over farmland that can feasibly be held has long been a major part of both external wars and factional strife inside a civilization.

Hunting and gathering supplemented by personal vegetable gardening is very common. While hunting comes with its own dangers, it's at least transient instead of making you a permanent target. Nature mages are sought-after attachments for armies and welcome occupants in cities because they can improve food with magic to provide more nutrition and make it last longer.

Awakening Gods with ties to nature, growth, and harvests are extremely common. Nearly everybody needs to eat, and so some of the first prayers to be spoken en masse were cries for help against starvation.

This lack of food security also plays into other elements of society. Imprisonment is extremely rare and long-term imprisonment is virtually unheard of, and one of the reasons why is because feeding prisoners to keep them alive is extremely difficult. It makes far more sense to commit prisoners to indentured servitude (perhaps even on a farm)

than it does to put them in a box and pay to feed both the prisoners and their caretakers.

Food and starvation also provides necromancy with an insidious way to reappear in any civilization from time to time. Undead farmers are tireless, need not eat themselves, and losing them isn't nearly the blow to the living that losing a loved one is.

In theory it's an excellent combination. In practice, most cultures have extreme cultural taboos around either necromancy in general or using necromancy this way that make this untenable (not to mention the disease risk of your fruit being picked by a pile of rotting flesh), but it's less frowned upon amongst desperate people and bandits that can't get their hands on slaves – at least until they realize that they are the ones the necromancer intends to be the next batch of undead tending the fields.

RACES OF THE WORLD

Ankaru is home to dozens of races. Most of them have no interaction with more than one or two other races who either share a society or are part of a caste system. For example, giants commonly rule over an underclass of humans.

The insular nature of people is less about race and more about cultural integration, and that's for good reason. Humans of Rus may have no problem with Chudes of Rus, but would be very wary of humans of Machaka, because humans of Machaka really are likely to be trying to supplant them, and even if not disease follows in their wake.

It's not xenophobia per say, because a phobia is an irrational fear, and the fear of cultural outsiders is very much rational. The diseases and ruin that come in the face of heavy migration is a tale older than recorded history.

As a result, individuals are far more likely to tolerate a roving trader or an emissary than a new neighbor. One brings benefits or news and then goes away. The other sets root next door and tries to turn your culture into his. Rare individuals can overcome this stigma, but only partially and only towards people who know them or at least know of them.

In most cases this means that an accepted foreigner came to the area another way outside of their own control, perhaps by being a slave first. This makes them less threatening to their hosts and gives them time to become a known factor before they can be run out of town or slain.

CHAPTER 2: CHARACTER CREATION



MARVERNI DRUIDS COMMUNE WITH ANCIENT TREE spirits from their deep forest grove, their breath misting with words of power that have echoed for countless generations. Battle-scarred Vanir sail the coasts, looking for human settlements to raid. Undead priests of dying faiths guard crumbling temples, maintaining rituals that are prophesied to summon forth champions of old to restore their empire. Almost any kind of legendary figure may find their calling in this age of divine ascension, where mortal and immortal fates intertwine and the world is poised to undergo dramatic change.

When deciding what your character will be like, discuss the kind of group you want to create with the other players. This makes sure that the group's characters complement each other in both skills and story. Your GM may also have a particular kind of game in mind, and you'll need to make sure you have the right mix of characters for that.

Typically, characters will be drawn from a single nation. This isn't a mechanical requirement of the game, but a result of the political realities of Ankaru.

CREATING A CHARACTER

To create a character you'll need a blank Character Creation Worksheet and a blank Character Sheet. The worksheet is designed to help you keep track of things that are needed during character creation, but not needed during play. Generally, when you receive Experience Points (XP), you will spend it to improve your character in some way. This process of paying for abilities is handled on the Character Creation Worksheet, but the final result will be logged on the Character Sheet.

Below are the steps to follow to fill out the Character Creation Worksheet for initial play. When it is time to log that information on the Character Sheet, the steps that follow will instruct you to log the final value on your Character Sheet.

FOUNDATIONS

Your character's foundations are the facts about them that have brought them to this point and define their current trajectory in life (whether or not life goes according to plan is a different matter). Unlike a character's backstory that covers specific events that have happened to them, foundations are broad-strokes and largely immutable.

The foundational elements of a character's past are their Civilization, Subculture, and Race – *what are they and where do they come from?* The foundational element of a character's present and hopeful future is their Archetype – *what do they aspire to be?*

STEP 1: CHOOSE A CIVILIZATION

Your Civilization represents the culture and traditions that shaped your character's early development. More than just geography or politics, Civilizations in this world are defined by the fundamental nature of their people, their mastery of specific forms of magic, and their connection to the divine – both current and to long-dead ancient gods.

Each Civilization offers a distinct approach to power and survival in the world. Often this coincides with the nature of the races that exist within the Civilization (imagine what ways of living will come natural to a Civilization of frost

giants as compared to a Civilization of cave-dwelling amphibians).

Even race is an outgrowth of your Civilization. The human amazons of the deep swamps of Sauromatia are very, very different from the human barbarian smiths of the frigid hills of Ulm.

Select a **Civilization** and write it on your **Character Creation Worksheet**.

SUBCULTURES

Some civilizations have Subcultures – groups of people within a civilization that lead a very different lifestyle to other groups. Life in the wild moiety of Rus is significantly different than life in the settled moiety. The Androphag tribe of Sauromatia is culturally distinct from the other tribes ruled by the ancestors of the Amazons. A Subculture may impact your characteristics, your starting skills and talents, or what archetypes are available to you.

If your **Civilization** contains **Subcultures**, select a **Subculture** and write it on your **Character Creation Worksheet**.

Each Civilization has an entry in **Ch. 3: Civilizations**, where your additional character options will be listed.

KNOWN CIVILIZATIONS OF ANKARU

Name	Description
Abyssia, Children of Flame	Lava-born humanoids that radiate heat. Abyssians mainly use heavy infantry. They have skilled Fire and Blood mages and their priests can perform blood sacrifices. Abyssians dislike cold provinces.
Arco, the Golden Land	An ancient human kingdom led by Philosophers. Their priestesses can heal wounded soldiers and the Oreiads and their Mystics are skilled in Astral and Elemental magic.
Atlantis, the Deep Ones	An underwater nation of amphibious beings. They have powerful Earth and Water mages and powerful priests.
Berytos, the Phoenix Empire	A land of sailors and tradesmen who have founded dozens of colonies. Rumors are that they have become influenced by the blood cult of a faraway land they discovered.
Helheim, the Hanged Kings	A civilization of Vanir ruled by the Hanged Kings guarding the entrance to Hel. Vanir can hide themselves with illusions and their Valkyries are blessed by a dead god to have the power of flight. The Hangadrrots are powerful Death and Air mages and the Svartalf smiths are skilled in Earth and Death magic.
Marverni, the Council of Druids	A confederacy of tribal chiefdoms led by Druids, powerful readers of the stars and the Earth. Most of their warriors fight bare-chested, but noble warriors use chainmail armor. Gutuaters adorn the warriors with magical tattoos.
Rus, the Sons of Heaven	A Kingdom of the frozen lands. It is a nation of humans and mighty Chudes divided into two moieties.
Ulm, Enigma of Steel	A civilization with a barbarian legacy. They are strong and proud and worship steel and the spirits of the wild. The warriors of Ulm are stealthy and well versed in the ways of the wild. Their warrior smiths are masters of magical forging.

STEP 2: CHOOSE A RACE

Once you know where your character comes from, the next step is to decide *what they are*. Your race defines the biological and supernatural heritage that courses through your veins, influencing not just your physical form but also your innate affinities for certain magics, resistances to the world's perils, and interactions with the divine forces that underpin your civilization's lore.

Some races are ancient, born in the first ages of the world, while others are younger peoples molded by gods or shaped by harsher circumstance. Whether you are mortal human shaped by your civilization's unique environment, an ancient being whose bloodline predates recorded history, or something born from divine will, your race provides the foundation upon which your capabilities and limitations are built.

Many civilizations include more than one race, and each race brings unique strengths and limitations, often serving distinct roles in their society.

RACIAL TYPES

All races have one or more racial type that are a more general category for the race. The Jotun of Niefelheim and the Gigantes of Mekone are both *giants*. The Barbarians of Ulm and the Humans of Rus are both *humans*. Racial Types are sometimes used in spells or other abilities. For example, a magic item that needs the blood of a Dragon isn't too fussy about whether or not it comes from a mighty Wyrm or an ancient Linnormr.

Select a **Race** from those available to your **Civilization** and **Subculture** and write both it and the **Racial Types** it belongs to on your **Character Creation Worksheet**.

The available Races for your Civilization can be found in your Civilization's entry in [Ch. 3: Civilizations](#).

STEP 3: CHOOSE AN ARCHETYPE

Your Archetype defines your character's role and specialization within your Civilization – the path they have chosen to walk and the skills they have devoted their life to mastering. From the scout who ranges far from home to map unknown territories, to the hoplite who stands in bronze-clad formation against charging cavalry, to the mystic who bends reality with arcane formulas, each Archetype represents elements of your skills, your career, and your position in society.

Your Archetype determines your core abilities, your Skills and Talents, and the magic you can wield. An Archetype is divided up into four Archetype Tiers that represent your progression through that Archetype, such as a freelance knight beginning as a squire and ending as a knight commander.

Most people in the world have one Archetype throughout their life, but others may change Archetypes. That same freelance knight may marry into the royal family and retire from active service to become a noble, while a low-ranking noble scion may become an emissary for their sorcerer-king

and focus his abilities on this new endeavor instead of the typical day-to-day life he came from.



TRADITIONS

Each Archetype comes from one or more Traditions, which are general categories shared across Civilizations. Many Civilizations have specific Archetypes representing troops in their armies that are unique from another, but they all come from the Soldier Tradition, or distinct wielders of holy magic who all share the Priest Tradition. Though their specific representations and skills will be different, they will share elements in common with one another.

Some Skills and Talents are only available to Archetypes of a specific Tradition, or are barred from specific Traditions. Some Archetypes require having already completed an Archetype of a specific Tradition, or require never having been in an Archetype from a specific Tradition.

Select an **Archetype** from those available to you and write both it and the **Traditions** it belongs to on your **Character Creation Worksheet**.

The available Archetypes for your Civilization, Subculture, and Race can be found in your Civilization's section in [Ch. 3: Civilizations](#).

ATTRIBUTES

Attributes describe your character's innate capabilities – how fast or strong you are, how much damage you can sustain, or how well you cope with stressful situations. Attributes include the ten Characteristics, Health, Movement, Fate, and Resilience.

Your starting Attributes are based largely on your Foundations, but unlike those intrinsic elements, Attributes can be improved over time as your character gains experience.

STEP 4: CHARACTERISTICS

Each character has ten Characteristics used in Tests (see [Ch. 7: Core Rules](#)), to determine if you perform an action successfully. The human average for a Characteristic is 30. Those who are gifted, or well-practiced, may achieve scores of over 40; only the most dedicated and experienced will achieve scores of over 60. Of course, other races have their own strengths and weaknesses, so their averages are different, sometimes significantly so.

The base Characteristics for your Civilization, Subculture, and Race will be listed in the Attributes table in your Civilization's entry in [Ch. 3: Civilizations](#).

Values will be added to the columns of the **Attributes** section of your **Character Creation Worksheet**, as noted below.

Refer to the **Attributes** table listed in your Civilization's entry in [Ch. 3: Civilizations](#). Write the values for your Subculture and Race in the **Base** column. Then, assign a total of 100 points (min 5 and max 15) across your **Characteristics**. Write these down in the **Assigned** column. Add the two columns together, and write those down in the **Foundational** column.

STEP 5: HEALTH

Your Health shows how much Damage you can endure based on your physical power and your force of will to shrug off injury.

Unlike other Attributes, Health is derived from your other Characteristic bonuses – typically Strength, Toughness, and Willpower. Refer to your Civilization's Attributes Table to determine the formula for your Subculture and Race. A Characteristic's bonus is the first digit of the Characteristic (37 and 39 would both have the same bonus of 3; 56 would have a bonus of 5).

Find the **Attributes Table** for your Civilization. Calculate your **Health** using the formula provided and enter it in the **Formalistic Health** field. The rest of the fields will be completed later after selecting Talents.

Note that various Talents, including automatic racial Talents such as *Small* and *Large*, will also adjust how much Health you have.

THE TEN CHARACTERISTICS

PROWESS

Armsmanship (ARM) Your skill at fighting hand-to-hand, your ability to land a measured blow, and effectiveness in the free-for-all of a massed melee. It is also used for unarmed combat, where your body is the weapon!

Marksmanship (MRK) Your effectiveness at hitting with ranged weapons like bows and throwing knives, and for throwing things generally. It is also used as the basis for other ranged attacks like a manticore's spikes.

PHYSICAL

Strength (STR) How much damage you do in melee, how much you can lift, and how good you are at things like swimming and climbing.

Toughness (TOU) Your physical hardiness. It helps you survive damage in combat but will also help with things like surviving harsh conditions and standing up to poison.

Agility (AGI) Physical coordination and natural athleticism, and the basis for things like running, riding, and hiding. Agility is also used for dodging blows in combat.

Dexterity (DEX) Your affinity for performing fine and delicate manual tasks like playing a musical instrument or skilled manufacturing. It will also help you with things like sleight of hand and picking pockets.

MENTAL

Cunning (CUN) Speed of thought and reaction, especially in the heat of battle and when under pressure. It determines combat order, and help you be the first to react to danger. It also determines your powers of intuition and perception.

Intelligence (INT) Your powers of thought, analysis, and understanding. Useful for healing, evaluating, and general knowledge, and vital for the understanding and casting of magical spells.

Willpower (WIL) General strength of mind, and your ability to shrug off difficulty and plough on with the job at hand. It helps with resisting all sorts of influence and coercion, and guards against fear and terror.

Fellowship (FEL) Your ability to get on with people and come across as generally pleasant and acceptable. It will help you when chatting to locals or commanding people in battle, charming the guards, or attempting to bribe them. For pious characters, it also helps with communicating with your deity.

STEP 6: FATE AND RESILIENCE

Your Fate represents your destiny and Resilience represents your inner strength. Each of these attributes can be spent permanently to create a powerful effect. Each is also tied to a subordinate pool (Fortune, a measure of your luck, and Resolve, defining your grit). Your Resilience also interacts with your Motivation created later in Step 13. See [Page 170](#) for more information on these four Attributes.

DETERMINING FATE AND RESILIENCE

You start with a base value for Fate and Resilience, as listed on the Attributes Table for your Civilization. The table also shows a number of Extra Points to spread between these two as you see fit.

The higher your Fate, the luckier you are and the more Fortune points you can have at one time. A higher Resilience shows you can steel through any situation and the more Resolve points you can have at one time.

DETERMINING FORTUNE AND RESOLVE

Your initial Fortune is equal to your Fate. Your initial Resolve is equal to your Resilience.

Fill out the **Fate and Resilience** section of your **Character Creation Worksheet** by writing down the initial points in the first column and how you spend your Extra Points in the second column. Add these together to get the final result.

STEP 7: MOVEMENT

Movement is used to determine your Walk and Run speed. Standard human movement is typically 4. If using a grid for movement, this indicates how many squares you can move in a Round. Over the longer term it indicates how many miles per hour you can travel on foot. For more on Movement, see [Page 181](#).

Movement	Walk (squares, yds)	Run (squares, yds)
3	3 (6)	6 (12)
4	4 (8)	8 (16)
5	5 (10)	10 (20)

STEP 8: ADVANCE CHARACTERISTICS

Find your archetype in your civilization's entry in [Ch. 3: Civilizations](#). Under each characteristic is an Advance Scheme – the Archetype Tier at which the characteristic unlocks to become Focused for your archetype. To start with, each archetype has three Focused characteristics marked with a “1” under the characteristic abbreviation. You can allocate a total of 5 Advances across these Characteristics as you choose.

Select the 5 Advances you'd like to apply. In the **Character Creation Worksheet**, fill out your Advances in the **Free Advances** column for each of the **Characteristics** you select.



The demon Grathok finally lured Semira to her demise in his fiery lair. After years of stalking, her luck had finally run out...or had it?

CAPABILITIES

Capabilities represent the things your character can actually do – the Skills you possess and the Talents you've accumulated so far in life. Capabilities are one of the main things that you acquire throughout your life as you gain experience.

Skills represent areas of trained learning or experience, and Talents describe special abilities your character can access. Together, these define how your character approaches challenges and solves problems, both in and out of danger.

Lists of all Skills and Talents are provided in [Ch. 5: Skills](#) and [Ch. 6: Talents](#). The Skills and Talents you have available to you at character creation are primarily determined by your Foundations.

STEP 9: SKILLS

Skills are classified as either *Basic* or *Advanced*. Basic Skills represent common abilities that everyone can perform – you can use these Skills without any Advances in them, at a level equal to the governing Characteristic. Advanced Skills require specialist knowledge, and you can only use these skills if you have taken at least one Advance in them.

Some skills have different thresholds, such as Language skills requiring at least 10 Advances to be considered fluent.

WHAT ARE SKILL ADVANCES?

Like Characteristic Advances, Skill Advances show specific training in a Skill. All Skills are associated with a Characteristic, and the number of Advances you have in the Skill is added to that Characteristic to show you how skilled you are. So, as Climb is associated with Strength, if you have a Strength of 38, and 8 Climb Advances, your Climb Skill is 46. This is explained in full in [Ch. 5: Skills](#).

SUBCULTURE AND RACE SKILLS

Each Subculture and Race has a variety of Skills that are focused in their culture or come natural to their race. In the course of your normal life up to this point, you would have had a fair bit of practice and experience with these. As such, you may choose 3 Skills to gain 5 Advances each, and 3 Skills to gain 3 Advances each. If two Skills are listed with an *or*, you may choose only one of those skills to put Advances in. If a grouped skill appears with *(Any)*, you may only take one to put points in. If you are meant to be able to take it more than once, then it will appear more than once in the list.

For example, a list of "Charm *or* Intimidate, Melee *(Any)*, Melee *(Any)*" would allow you to put Advances in either Charm or Intimidate (but not both), plus exactly two Melee (Weapon) Skills.

Look at your Subculture and Race to determine which Skills you may put Advances in. In the **Skills** section of the **Character Creation Worksheet**, add 5 Advances to three of these skills and 3 Advances to another three. Write this down in the **Racial Advances** column.

ARCHETYPE SKILLS

You begin at the first Archetype Tier listed in your Archetype's description. There are 10 Skills and 4 Talents listed with that tier, and you can choose which of these you are most proficient at. Allocate a total of 40 Advances to your ten starting Skills, with no more than 10 Advances allocated to any single Skill during this step. It is OK if you already allocated Advances to one of these Skills in a previous step, putting the total over 10, so long as you only assign 10 Advances now.

Look at your **Archetype's** Advance Scheme to determine which Skills you may put Advances in at Tier 1. In the **Skills** section of the **Character Creation Worksheet**, add 40 Advances to these Skills, with no more than 10 Advances going to any one Skill during this step. Write this down in the **Archetype Advances** column.

STEP 10: TALENTS

Your race provides you with talents that are part of your physical being, such as resistance to cold or darkvision. Your subculture provide you talents that are gained from growing up where you did, such as the ability to traverse a specific terrain easily or a trade. These are listed with your subculture and race in your civilization's entry in [Ch. 3: Civilizations](#). You start with all of the Talents in these lists, unless they are presented with an *or* between them. In that case, choose one of the Talents among them.

For example, the list "Coolheaded *or* Suave, Craftsman *(Any)*" would provide you with two Talents – either Coolheaded or Suave, plus your selection of any one of the Craftsman (Trade) Talents.

Your Archetype will also have Talents listed in the Tier 1 Advance Scheme. You may choose one of these Talents to begin play with, representing your hard work and training thus far.

Some Talents can be learned multiple times. If you have an opportunity to learn a Talent a second time, check the Talent entry in [Ch. 6: Talents](#) to see if it can be learned again and if your characteristic bonus is high enough to allow you to do so.

Look at your Subculture and Race to determine which Talents you start with. Make any optional selections or selections for grouped Talents. Find the **Talents** section of the **Character Creation Worksheet** and write each of these down in the **Foundations** column.

DETAILS

The bare bones of your character are in place, so let's add some details, fleshing your character out in your imagination, determining what you look like, how you think, and what drives you.

STEP 11: PHYSICAL PROFILE

Your character's civilization will have details on the physical traits of the Races present there, as well as common names. You may choose any name that fits the world, but if it is outside of the norms you should be able to explain why to add additional flavor!

In your Civilization's entry in [Ch. 3: Civilizations](#), refer to the details on racial and subcultural physical features and names. Choose these features and a name. Write them down in the **Details** section of the [Character Creation Worksheet](#)

STEP 12: BACKGROUND

Your Background represents who your character was before the story begins, the life they lived, and the people and experiences that shaped them. Backgrounds have a structured format with five parts:

CONCEPT

Write at least give things about your character's concept and background. Five things that you think are the most essential parts of your character.

GOALS

List two goals for the character that you, as a player, think would be cool to see accomplished in-game.

SECRETS

List two secrets about your character. One the character knows, and one that involves him but that he is not actually aware of yet. The GM will create a third secret which you as a player will not be aware of!

CONNECTIONS

Describe three people that are tied to the character through blood, romance, or honor. Two of them are friendly to the character, one is hostile. All can do something useful for you, if you can get the situations to line up. If you like, you can include a fourth connection – an enemy of the character – as well.

MEMORIES

Describe three memories that your character has. They don't have to be elaborate, but they should provide some context and flavor.

Write your character's background in the **Background** section of the [Character Creation Worksheet](#).

EXAMPLE: GARRUK OF THE BROKEN SPEAR

Concept

1. Garruk is a scarred veteran of the spear tribes who fought in the Ashen War, when the clans burned each other's villages over the last copper mine in the valley. He carries the broken haft of the spear that killed his chief, as a token of vengeance.
2. Garruk now wanders the trade roads as a sellsword and caravan guard, but he secretly seeks signs of the Spear Clan's surviving enemies to take his revenge.
3. Garruk believes the gods are cruel things who laugh at mortal suffering. Still, he carries charms and bones, because it is better to stay on their good side than to risk their wrath.
4. He keeps a pack of mongrel dogs, ahalf-wild, that follow him from village to village. They are both his companions and his early warning when something stirs in the night.
5. Though slow to trust, Garruk is loyal to those who share his fire and prove their strength. In a world of filth and betrayal, loyalty is the only coin he values.

Goals

1. I want to see Garruk track down the Black Knife Clan who slaughtered his people and put his chieftain's skull on a pike.
2. I'd like to see Garruk grow beyond a mere wandering killer – perhaps leading his own band, carving out a place where the Spear Clan name might rise again.

Secrets

1. **Known:** Garruk keeps the skull of his old chieftain wrapped in cloth and bone charms, and speaks to it in private. He believes the old man's spirit whispers guidance to him, though the advice is often cruel.
2. **Unknown:** One of the Black Knife warriors who burned his village now serves as a captain for a local warlord – a man who has hired Garruk more than once, without either realizing their connection.
3. **(GM Secret):** The skull Garruk carries is not silent. A malevolent spirit has entered it, slowly twisting Garruk's mind and nudging him toward bloodier, darker choices.

Connections

1. **Torga the Bone-Seer:** An old woman who reads cracked bones for omens. She warned Garruk before the Ashen War that death would follow him, but still tends his wounds and feeds him when he comes to her cave.
2. **Keth the Dog-Boy:** A feral child who travels with Garruk, tending his mongrels and scavenging food. The boy barely speaks, but his keen ears and strange instincts have saved Garruk's life more than once.
3. **Dravok the Pike-Lord:** A brutal warlord who once hired Garruk as a spearhand. Dravok respects him but sees him as a tool, and would happily use him to crush the last of the Spear Clan if it served his ambitions.

Memories

1. Garruk remembers the red smoke over the valley the night the Spear Clan burned. The screams of women and the barking of dogs never leave his dreams.
2. He remembers the first man he ever killed – a rival youth during a coming-of-age trial – and the cold satisfaction he felt as he washed blood off his hands in the river.
3. He remembers the night Keth appeared at his campfire, filthy and thin as a bone, sitting silently beside him until morning, as though the boy had always been there.

STEP 13: GOALS

Your character's goals help you understand what they want and why they take action. They give your character direction, create opportunities for meaningful choices, and help the GM build stories that matter to them. Clear goals make your character feel active and invested in the world, rather than just along for the ride.

Your goals are codified in a Motivation and two Ambitions, each of which can change over time as your character's story progresses, albeit at different speeds, and provide you with other benefits such as Resolve points and XP.

MOTIVATION

All characters choose a Motivation. It represents your character's core essence, a word or phrase that sums up what you live for. In addition to the obvious roleplaying benefits for portraying your character, Motivation is used to help you regain Resolve points. When considering your Motivation, think of something that is fundamental to your character's nature. Also try to make your Motivation something fun to roleplay, and something that will work well with the other PCs and their motivations.

Example

Lysander, a young Mystic studying in Arco's grand libraries, has 'Thrillseeker' for his Motivation. He lives his life in pursuit of excitement and danger, and Lysander may regain resolve points when he actively seeks out risky situations; perhaps he provokes antagonism in wine halls, or deliberately risks the attention of astral horrors by casting spells a little beyond his abilities.

Example

Brunhild, a huskari of Vanheim, has 'Protect the weak' as her Motivation. She is driven to stand up to tyrants and oath-breakers, risking life and limb to save her kinfolk. Brunhild will regain her Resolve whenever she rescues others, or puts herself in harm's way to protect another from the depredations of other Vanir.

Write your **Motivation** in the **Details** section on your **Character Creation Worksheet**.

AMBITIONS

Ambitions are a Character's goals in life – what they want to achieve. All characters have both a Short-term and Long-term Ambition. These generally pull directly from your background, but Short-term Ambitions in particular can vary widely based on what is going on in your character's life at the moment.

Consult with the GM when choosing your Ambitions. Your GM has final say on the acceptability of an Ambition, and whether it is short-term or long-term. You may change Ambitions between sessions.

SHORT-TERM AMBITIONS

Short-term ambitions represent your immediate goals. They are outcomes you wish to achieve within days and weeks. Under normal circumstances, a Short-term Ambition should

take at least two to three sessions to complete. Example Short-term Ambitions include:

- Ruining the reputation of a romantic rival.
- Avenging a fallen comrade.
- Befriending a reclusive scholar.

LONG-TERM AMBITIONS

Long-term Ambitions are goals you will need to work on for months or years to complete, and may never be achieved at all, perhaps taken more as a description of a primary motivation in your life than a realistic outcome. Example Long-Term Ambitions include:

- Owning your own coaching inn.
- Building your village into a thriving town.
- Ridding the Colleges of Magic of Elven influence.

Write your **Short-term Ambition** and **Long-term Ambition** in the **Details** section of the **Character Creation Worksheet**.

STEP 14: TRAPPINGS

Your Trappings are the equipment, clothes, weapons, and other items your character carries. You begin play with initial trappings determined by your Archetype, as well as some metal wealth for trading.

The amount of wealth you start with depends on your Archetype's Status and Standing. Find your Archetype's Status listed beside your Archetype's name. It will be marked as either Bronze, Silver, or Gold (your Status) followed by a number (your Standing). Use the table below to determine your initial wealth.

STARTING WEALTH

Status	Starting Wealth
Copper	10g copper per Standing
Bronze	10g bronze per Standing
Silver	10g silver per Standing
Gold	10g gold per Standing

Before play begins, you may use your wealth to purchase additional trappings or sell the ones you have. Refer to **Ch. 12: Trading** for rules on trading and **Ch. 9: Equipment** for lists of equipment lists. Your GM will decide what equipment is available for you to have purchased before play begins.

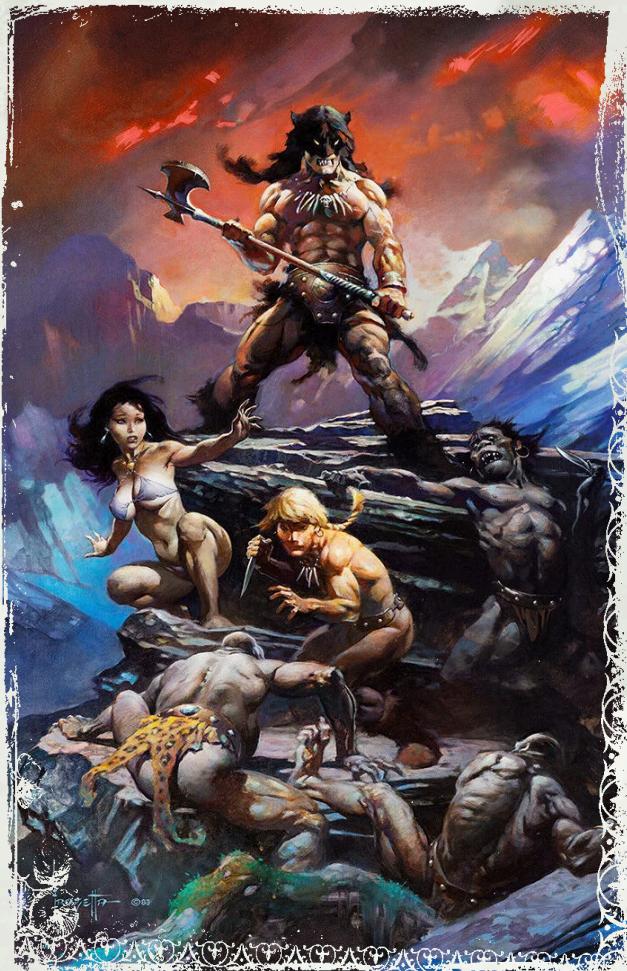
Find your **Status** and **Standing** listed next to your Archetype's name. Use these values and the **Starting Wealth Table** above to determine how much wealth you start with. Write this wealth and your starting trappings down in the **Trappings** section of the **Character Creation Worksheet**.

PARTY

Now that you have almost finished making your Character, you need to consider the other players in your party. Everyone will have more fun when your Characters can engage and interact with one another; while some intra-party tension can be enjoyable, it is important that you are not constantly at one another's throats.

You will also want to consider how your party member know one another. Are you friends? Are you the retainers of a noble, or travelling companions on a river barge? Is your GM going to have you meet during the first session?

All players in your group should also discuss what your collective goals are, and then choose a Short-term and Long-term Party Ambition. Much like your personal Ambitions, party Ambitions can be changed between sessions.



SHORT-TERM PARTY AMBITIONS

Short-term Party Ambitions have the same scope as your personal Short-term Ambitions, but are for the whole group. Your personal Ambitions can never be the same as your party Ambitions, but there is no reason they can't complement each other. Examples of Short-Term Party Ambitions include:

- Outwitting a rival group, securing a job at their loss.
- Hunting down the killer of a lost party member.

- Impressing your patron by completely succeeding in an appointed task.

LONG-TERM PARTY AMBITIONS

Much like Short-Term Party Ambitions, Long-term Party Ambitions work like your personal Ambitions but they are for your entire group. Your party's Long-term Party Ambition should take months or years to see to fruition. Examples of Long-term Party Ambitions include:

- Eradicate an empire-wide heretical cult.
- Orchestrate the overthrow or destruction of an opposing civilization's deity
- Become Heroes of the Lands, each earning accolades and a gift by none other than the Awakening God itself!

ADVANCEMENT

Experience Points (XP) are used to improve your character. The GM will give you XP after every session of play, and you may be rewarded for doing particularly well. This could include successfully resolving the ongoing adventure, roleplaying your character well, or defeating important enemies. Between sessions, you spend your XP to buy new Skills and Tlanets, to increase Characteristics, and to change Archetypes.

CHARACTERISTIC AND SKILL XP COSTS

Advances	Characteristic XP Cost	Skill XP Cost
0 to 5	25	10
6 to 10	30	15
11 to 15	40	20
16 to 20	50	30
21 to 25	70	40
26 to 30	90	60
31 to 35	120	80
36 to 40	150	110
41 to 45	190	140
46 to 50	230	180

OTHER IMPROVEMENT COSTS

Improvement	XP Cost
+1 Talent	100 XP +100 XP per time the Talent has already been taken
Leave a Complete Archetype	100 XP
Leave an Incomplete Archetype	300 XP

FINISHED!

Now your character and party are created and you are ready to play!

CHAPTER 3: CIVILIZATIONS



THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE OF THE WORLD REFLECTS ITS spiritual transformation. Without the Sovereign's unifying cosmic authority, and with multiple competing powers now answering mortal prayers, the major civilizations have become increasingly factional and militaristic.

The petty kingdoms of the Sovereign's fleeing clergy grow bold and the encroaching wilderness brings new dangers, for the Old Gods are not the only things that have begun to stir.

War has taken on religious overtones unknown since the earliest ages. Armies look to march under the banners of their chosen gods, and conflicts between civilizations often reflect deeper theological differences between their patron deities.

Inside many civilizations are factions agitating for war with enemies within and without. Diplomatic marriages and treaties carry new significance when sworn before altars dedicated to powers that might actually intervene to enforce or punish violations of sacred oaths. Perhaps more than anything else, eight centuries of civilizational collapse

coupled with the danger of the vast wilderness has tempered the ability of civilizations to wage external wars, but it is only a matter of time before Awakened Ones are able to tame their city states and the surrounding lands enough to march to war.

THE GREAT POWERS

The world is dotted with petty kingdoms, beast lairs, and infested ruins, but there are also a few lands where civilization has somehow survived, albeit barely. These are the great powers – or at least nations that would style themselves as such. Compared to the past, each of them is barely more than a weak fiefdom, but so great has been the decline that this is all it takes to be great amongst their contemporaries. Most importantly, they have an aligned people with a large enough populace of worshippers to awaken a deity. Not all of them are free of their bonds, but they are at least capable of answering prayers and spreading their dominion.

RUS, SONS OF HEAVEN

WHEN WE FORGET THE THUNDER, WE GROW WEAK. WHEN WE FORGET THE SUN, WE BECOME BEASTS.

--- Nadya Stallkild, Daughter of the Sun

In the frozen lands where harsh winters stretch long and summers burn brief, Rus stands as a realm of dualities, divided yet united. This is a land where two peoples – humans and the mighty Chudes – have intermingled without either race dominating the other, creating a unique civilization built upon the foundation of dual traditions and complementary ways of life.

Both the Chudes and the humans have adapted to the harsh northern climate, and together they have formed a society unlike any other – one split into two distinct moieties that represent fundamentally different approaches to existence, yet bound together by shared blood and common cause.

LIFE AND SOCIETY

Rusian society is fundamentally organized around two moieties, each representing a different path of life and spiritual understanding. Both moieties have immense respect for one another, although in the Age of Answering some fractures between the priests who worship the Thunder and the priests who worship the Sun have begun to appear. This fissure is only exacerbated by the imbalance in the effect of the Age of Silence on the two groups.

Life in Rus is hard these days. The forests and meadows are as bountiful as they ever were, but being able to safely explore them is not the surety it once was. During the Age of the Throne, Rus was already dominated by nomadic bands and small villages, so the decline of its civilization for the past 800 years has looked different than it has for other lands.

Instead of losing castles and cities that it never had to decline, Rus has lost access to food and other important resources that have helped its people survive the harsh environment. The wild moiety has been hit especially hard. The creatures of whispered legend that once stirred only in the deepest of forests have spread their domain, taking the lives of many Rusians and leaving their way of life difficult to maintain.

But the people of Rus are extraordinarily hardy and don't fuss much about it. "If the bear can survive the winter, then so can we" is a common refrain. Led by the Thunder Priests, the wild folk have begun to migrate further north than they have before, away from the great forests and toward the northern shores to catch fish.

The settled villages have fared better, but only just so. Their agriculture is easier to manage, but they relied on trade with their nomadic kin to bring in meat and medicines. They can't easily uproot, and so keeping the peace has been a challenge for many chieftains.



Trade between the two moieties is a significant part of society, and grand festivals are held during the times of year when the nomads venture into the villages to sell food and resources in exchange for finished goods produced in the village.

Marriage inside your moiety is disallowed, and so these visits are also the time for young Rusians to meet potential partners, and for families to cement alliances through marriage and the sharing of food.

RACES OF RUS

Unlike most other multiracial civilizations, the two races of Rus live together in harmony, with neither one being subservient to the other. Even in their earliest mythologies the Humans and Chudes were living together, with neither suddenly appearing in lands owned by the other at any point. As far as anyone in Rus knows or cares to know, the two have lived in perfect harmony since the dawn of time and will continue to do so until the end of it.

THE CHUDES

THE BEAR-SHAPE IS NOT A GIFT WE TAKE, BUT A TRUTH WE BECOME. IN THE SACRED FLESH WE FIND WHAT OTHERS MUST SEEK IN PRAYER — UNITY WITH THE DIVINE THAT MADE US.

--- Grozan, *Spirit of the Bear*

The Chudes are an exalted race of great strength and beauty. They stand a full head taller than the already tall Rusian humans, with a strength that seems to come as much from spirit as from flesh. Their hair is wild, their beards thick, and their eyes seem to hold the weight of old winters and older wars. They are said to be the children of spirits, born when gods and mortals mingled in the age before ages.

Chudes are immediately recognizable by their imposing physical presence. They stand a full head taller than humans, with powerful builds that combine divine grace with preternatural strength. Their features possess a beauty that marks them as beings touched by divinity. Not the otherworldly beauty of the Vanir, but a perfecting of the human form. Their eyes tend to be green or blue, and their hair golden or red.

Since before the Age of the Thrones, Chudes have been chief among the Thunder worshippers, with the powerful and highly respected Perkunu being a fixture in Rusian society around which many festivals and much fanfare has been devoted.

Early in the years of the Age of Silence, more Chudes began to join the settled moiety. Over the centuries, as worship of the Old Gods began to return, the settled Chudes began worshipping Sun gods previously unheard of. The most prominent families of the Chudes claim to be descendants of the gods and the Lord of Heaven himself. Their prayers were the first in Rus to be answered, which they have taken as a sign. Today, a huge amount of political and religious power in Rusian society flows through the Hall of the Dawn where the mightiest of the Sons of Heaven congregate.

Typically a human trait, the Chudes exhibit a predisposition towards transformations, with both Perkunu and Skinshifters being capable of taking various forms of bear. The bear is revered in Rusian society, but whether that was originally due to the Skinshifters, or if the Skinshifters gained their power due to reverence of the bear is unknown.

SUBCULTURE AND RACE ATTRIBUTES

Attribute	Settled Human	Wild Human	Settled Chude	Wild Chude
ARM	+20	+20	+30	+30
MRK	+20	+25	+20	+25
STR	+20	+20	+30	+30
TOU	+20	+25	+30	+35
AGI	+20	+20	+20	+20
DEX	+20	+20	+20	+20
CUN	+20	+20	+20	+20
INT	+20	+15	+20	+15
WIL	+20	+20	+20	+20
FEL	+20	+15	+20	+15
Health (SB+WB)	+(2xTB)	+(2xTB)	+(3xTB)	+(3xTB)
Movement	4	4	5	5
Fate	2	2	0	0
Resilience	1	1	2	2
Extra Points	3	3	1	1

SUBCULTURE SKILLS AND TALENTS

Subculture Skills and Talents

Settled Skills Charm, Gossip, Haggle, Intuition, Lore (History), Melee (Basic)

Settled Talents Craftsman (Any), Coolheaded or Suave

Wild Skills Athletics, Entertain (Storytelling), Lore (Beasts) or Lore (Folklore), Navigation, Outdoor Survival, Ranged (Bow)

Wild Talents Strider (Mountains), Strider (Woodlands)

RACE SKILLS AND TALENTS

Race Skills and Talents

Rusian Skills Cool, Perception

Rusian Talents Energy Resistance (Cold), Lightning Reflexes, Savvy or Sharp, Strider (Snow)

Chude Skills Athletics, Endurance

Chude Talents Attractive, Energy Resistance (Cold), Hardy, Strider (Snow)

THE HUMANS

THE OLD TABOOS BIND US TO ANCIENT WISDOM, BUT WISDOM WITHOUT GROWTH BECOMES MERE STUBBORNNESS. THE GODS FAVOR THOSE WHO ADAPT.

--- Radimir the Thundercaller

The humans of Rus are a hardy northern people shaped by generations of survival in one of the world's harshest climates. Humans have earned their place in the frozen kingdom not through divine gift, but through adaptability and fierce determination that has earned them the everlasting respect of their Chude kin.

The Chudes may be blessed with great strength and beauty, but settlements and tribes follow human leaders for the most part. Chude leaders are certainly not unheard of, but their natural gifts tend to lead them down different paths and away from politics.

Rusian humans are typically tall and robust, with the broad shoulders and strong limbs necessary for survival in their demanding homeland. Centuries of harsh winters have given them naturally pale complexions that only need to contend with the brief but intense summer sun. Their hair ranges from light brown to blonde, often worn long by the wild moiety and braided with bear claws, bones, or copper rings as marks of achievement.

The settled humans tend toward more practical grooming, keeping their hair neat and their beards well-trimmed. Scars are worn proudly as marks of survival and courage. All Rusian humans have developed a natural resistance to cold that allows them to function in temperatures that would incapacitate others. Their bodies have adapted to conserve heat efficiently, and they actually prefer cold climates to warmer regions, finding hot weather uncomfortable and draining.

CLOTHING

Rusians favor heavy clothing made from thick furs and woven wool. These days the clothing tends to be plain owing to the danger of foraging for the plants needed to make dyes, but in ages past their clothing was often decorated with intricate patterns that tell stories of hunts, battles, or spiritual visions. The human women of the villages of Rus may be the best wool weavers in all of Ankaru, and with the coming of the Age of Answering there is hope among the crafters that they'll once again be able to live up to the potential gifted to them by their ancestors.

THE TWO MOIETIES

Rusian society is fundamentally organized around two moieties, each representing a different path of life and spiritual understanding. These moieties are the Subcultures of Rus.

THE SETTLED MOIETY

The settled moiety (also called the hearth moiety) inhabits small villages established in areas of abundant local resources such as fertile farmland or pasture. It's a rare settlement in Rus that develops into a town, with most never going beyond a few hundred inhabitants, although a handful of towns and even a pair of proper cities (by Rusian standards) exist. Food in the villages varies widely from staple crops to fish, largely dependent on location.

The settled folk are the skilled craftsmen of Rus, and the villages also hold the vast majority of the scholars and mages, who require permanent settlement to do their work effectively. Most political power

Many of the hearth Rusians pay respects to the Bear and the Thunder just like their tribal kin, but during the latter days of the Age of Silence a new cult worshipping the Sun formed amongst the Chudes in the city of Solthrim. This new cult spread like wildfire through the great forest and within two decades it had become widespread throughout Rus.

One of the most critical functions of the settled moiety is as the keepers of traditions. Nearly every festival, and every

marriage, occurs in one of the villages. Priests of both religions

THE WILD MOIETY

The wild moiety (also called the tribal moiety) consists of hunters and nomads who dwell in the deep forests and distant mountains of the southern and western parts of Rus, living according to ancient ways. They worship the Bear and the Thunder, consuming their meat raw in sacred communion with the primal forces of nature.

These forest dwellers are renowned for their fury and battle prowess, and the greatest of their Chude priests and warriors are able to take the sacred shape of the bear itself. They follow taboos regarding permanent settlements and cooked food in order to maintain their connection to the untamed world through ritual and tradition.

With winter being long in the northern lands, these Rusians long ago learned to bring down prey year-round, which makes them invaluable to their semi-agrarian hearth kin. Winter and early spring festivals are held to celebrate the coming of tribal Rusians into the settled lands to trade and provide much-needed food.

INTERACTIONS BETWEEN MOIETIES

The moieties primarily lead separate lives, and do not see each other often outside of special occasions. Festivals and gatherings are a central part of Rusian culture, not only due to the critical trade it brings, but also due to the opportunity for the moieties to mix.

In Rus, you may only marry a partner from outside your moiety, so a major part of all festivals are opportunities for youths to meet one another and form relationships. Most festivals host at least one wedding, with the tribal partner and their family coming to the village of their betrothed. Both families will exchange large amounts of food and other goods, often including family heirlooms and other items of personal importance to the members. After the wedding festival, the couple will remain with whichever moiety the groom came from.

Chudes and humans cannot interbreed and never marry, as marriage without the possibility of children is neither recognized nor respected in Rus. Banishment is the traditional punishment, so on the rare occasion when a Chude and a human have developed a romantic relationship, they've left into the wild to live alone and are never seen again.

At the beginning of the Age of Answering, it was the Daughters of the Sun, not the Perkunu, whose prayers were first answered. This caused an explosion in the ranks of the Sun worshippers, and significantly spread it amongst humans where it had previously seen little purchase. The worshippers of the Bear and the Thunder harbor concerns and no small bit of jealousy over this. There are no truly heretical teachings amongst the two religions, so for now they are watching with wary eyes to determine if this is another member of the pantheon of their primal worship, a threat of replacement, or a false power leading Rusians astray.

CHAPTER 4: SKILLS

CHAPTER 5: TALENTS

CHAPTER 6: EQUIPMENT

CHAPTER 7: MAGIC

CHAPTER 8: MAGIC ITEMS

CHAPTER 9: CORE RULES

CHAPTER 10: DOMINIONS

CHAPTER 11: GOODS & SERVICES

CHAPTER 12: TRADE

CHAPTER 13: TRAVEL

CHAPTER XXX: STUFF AND THINGS



TIME TO DROP KNOWLEDGE

Use notes to point out some interesting information.

Tables and lists both work within a note.

TIME TO DROP KNOWLEDGE

Use descriptive boxes to highlight text that should be read aloud.

Tables and lists both work within a descriptive box.

CHARACTER ADVANCEMENT

Experience Points	Level	Proficiency Bonus
0	1	+2
300	2	+2
900	3	+2
2,700	4	+2
6,500	5	+3
14,000	6	+3

CHAPTER XXXX: TOMB OF THE NINE GODS



ACERERAK BUILT THE TOMB OF THE NINE GODS NOT ONLY to house the remains of Omu's trickster gods, but also to slay inter-lopers. However, few today even know the tomb exists, and thus it remains an enigma. Rare are the tavern tales that lure adventu-ers to its gates, and its horrors remain un-documented in the libraries of Candlekeep. The reason for this is simple: not one person who has entered the tomb has lived to tell the tale.

APPENDIX D: MONSTERS AND NPCs

This appendix details monsters and nonplayer characters that appear in this book and not in the *Monster's Manual*, the introduction of which explains how to interpret a stat block.

The creatures are presented in alphabetical order.

ANIME SPHINX

Tiny beast, manic-depressive evil

Armor Class 19 (chain mail, shield)

Hit Points 100(1d4 + 5)

Speed 30ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	2 (-4)	1 (-4)	13 (+2)	3 (-3)	1 (-4)

Condition Immunities melancholy, drunk

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Pottymouth

Challenge 10 (8682 XP)

Onion Stench. Any creatures within 5 feet of this thing develops an irrational craving for onion rings.

Hangriness. This creature is angry, and hungry. It will refuse to do anything with you until its hunger is satisfied.

When in visual contact with this creature, you must purchase an extra order of fries, even if they say they aren't hungry.

ACTIONS

Bulldog Rake. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. *Hit 5 (1d6 + 2)*

Team Foot. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. *Hit 5 (1d6 + 2)*

Turnbuckle Roll. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. *Hit 5 (1d6 + 2)*

Dual Throw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. *Hit 5 (1d6 + 2)*

WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE!

A napping curse has befallen everyone who's been raised from their beds. Its victims are nodding off, and all efforts to awaken them have failed.

The shoes of the unconscious are being stolen by someone and trapped inside an insomniac artifact. Only its destruction will free the trapped footwear and allow the sleepwalkers to walk once more.

All paths lead to Chult, a mysterious land of volcanoes, jungles, and the ruins of fallen kingdoms. Below them all awaits a sleepy tomb. The trap is set. Will you take the bait?

For use with the fifth edition
D&D Core Rulebook, Player's Handbook,
and Dungeon Master's Guide.

