

## **FOREWORD**

This booklet presents some extracts of the "bible" , which forms the basis of the world of Dark Earth. It provides an overall view of that world while remaining open to all sorts of further development.

It should be noticed that this is not game literature. A large measure of the enjoyment of the game will lie in discovering little by little the ins and outs of this universe as the player progress.

Dark Earth is a world that is both sombre and epic, mediaeval and technological, realistic and imaginary, which behind a "rational" facade hides mysteries and dangers that surpass human understanding.

Dark Earth will enable the player (and us, its designers) to explore a vast range of themes, places, actions and intrigues. Encounters and exchanges with other characters, epic combats between horrible creatures, discovering fantastic places and wondrous powers, reflecting on religion, legends, the future, and the origins of Mankind...

If you are ready for adventure, just follow the guide...

## GENERAL PRESENTATION

*"... The tiny group finally managed to struggle to the top of the ridge of black dust. Hulvar was the first to stop. Pulling back the heavy hood that hid his face, he let out a sigh of relief. As he turned to his two companions, his scarred face broke out into one of his rare smiles. "There!" he said, pointing to the plain that was now visible below. In spite of her wounds, Ylanna's face lit up. "The Stallite Dohymion!" she said in wonder, "we are back on the right path!" Behind her, old Ketoun was silent, but tears of joy rolled down his deeply wrinkled cheeks. For several minutes they stood, contemplating the sacred light of the Sun God piercing the layers of the Black Shroud, feasting their eyes on the dazzling walls of Dohymion. Suddenly, wild, inhuman cries echoed once more through the wastelands behind them. Hulvar grabbed Ylanna's hand and they ran towards the City of Light... "*

Dark Earth is our Earth, three centuries in the future. But far from being the happy, glowing future we might hope for, this is a ravaged, icy, merciless world. The days are perpetual twilight while the nights are shrouded in utter darkness.

At the start of the third millennium, a gigantic comet passed very close to Earth, spitting out hundreds of deadly meteorites that neither anyone nor anything on the planet was able to stop.

The resulting cataclysm changed the face of the earth forever. The sky became a dome of black dust, the cold air is thick and clings to the lungs before crystallizing on your cracked lips as you breathe out. There is a permanent murky smog, with visibility hardly ever exceeding five hundred yards.

Nobody ventures alone into the desolate landscape of Dark Earth. Death lurks everywhere. The treacherous ground gives way beneath careless feet, invisible poison clouds drift through the air, and the deathly cold of the night can paralyse even the strongest. And then there are the creatures, the 'things' that creep and crawl soundlessly through the night into the rash traveller's camp; the foolhardy voyager will never again see the half-light of day...

And yet in this nightmare world, a few islands of hope and civilization still cling on to life. These are the Stallites, fortified cities built by the survivors of the cataclysm. These places of refuge, warmth, and safety are blessed and protected by the Sun God. The Stallites are illuminated by miraculous shafts of light that rend the black veil of the sky. The people of the Stallites are united by the same religious fervour, the worship of the Sun God. Here they have been able to relearn how day follows night. They search their memories to try to understand and use the strange devices left over from pre-Cataclysm days. And most importantly, they learn how to control, conserve and radiate sunlight in order to protect themselves from the all-embracing darkness.

On Dark Earth, light is the most precious commodity there is.

Although the sombre story of the hail of fire and black rock that rained down on the planet has been handed down through legend, the inhabitants of Dark Earth are unaware of the real causes of the cataclysm. Many believe the catastrophe to be an ancient curse, a divine punishment. Only a very few know the Truth.

The future of the planet is in the hands of Man, a fragile, ephemeral creature caught between two duelling forces that are beyond his understanding.

## AND THERE WAS NO LIGHT...

*"... This is Troy McLurr for CNN World News. At the minute I'm in Louisville, Arizona, right in the middle of a high-risk area. The latest from the scientists is that the whole country will be bombarded by meteorites if - God forbid - Operation Guardian Angels proves unsuccessful. Everybody here is going through an extremely tense time right now, me included. Lots of people are watching the skies, waiting for the first sign of the comet that some are calling the 'Black Moon' or even 'the Wrath of God'. The rest have already made their decision and have fled to supposedly less exposed areas..."*

On December 6th, 2054, Professor Erataux of the Institute of Stellar Studies, high up in the French Pyrenees, saw a huge unknown celestial body appear in the sight of his telescope: a comet which had previously been masked by the sun and was heading towards the heart of our solar system. The Professor quickly informed his colleagues around the world of his discovery.

On December 8th, twelve of the world's greatest astronomers held a hastily convened meeting at the International Calculation Center in New York to compare their calculations and voice their concerns about the path of Erataux' comet. The ICC's computers soon confirmed what the astronomers already suspected: the comet would pass less than 40,000 kilometres away from Earth on December 23rd. At that distance, it seemed inevitable that pieces of the comet would crash to Earth. A particularly unwelcome Christmas present!

On December 10th, the heads of state of over thirty nations made their way quietly to Geneva for a top secret meeting. The only information that filtered through suggested that they were debating a new plan to maintain world peace.

On December 12th, the "Guardian Angels" plan was launched. This involved equipping thirteen of the space stations and satellites in orbit around the Earth with long-range nuclear weapons. The aim of these Space Guardians would be to destroy or divert any detritus resulting from the passage of Erataux' comet. Several space shuttles with weapons and technicians on board were sent up to the space stations. Each Guardian Angel would be equipped with ten gigantic Thunderstrike stratospheric nuclear missiles. In order to calm public opinion, an official communiqué was released, describing the launches as scientific or maintenance missions.

But on December 15th, the World Times leaked the truth about Operation Guardian Angels and the grave dangers of the comet skimming by so close to Earth. The whole media machine took up the story, and the announcement of the comet's arrival provoked an unprecedented wave of panic all over the world. The crime and suicide rates soared everywhere, and people flocked to churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples of every kind.

Forced to recognize the danger, the heads of state did all in their power to reassure their own people and quieten their fears, assuring them that the Guardian Angels plan would be a complete success. In some countries, however, martial law was declared in order to maintain a semblance of calm.

All over the world, men and women scanned the skies with terror-stricken eyes.

The first meteors were spotted on December 20th, automatically triggering the launch of thirteen missiles.

Unfortunately, the speed with which some of the defence systems had been installed caused serious malfunctions. One of the missiles exploded on the launch pad, completely destroying the Chinese Kwan II space station, while others went off course and were lost in space. In any case, it was too late... Despite all Man's efforts, the sons of the Black Moon hurtled towards Earth, destroying the missiles that flew into its path like moths into a flame. Some of the meteors were big enough to cause a cataclysm on a global scale...

Once it became clear that the Guardian Angels would not be able to avert disaster, panic took hold of the population completely. The whole world began to scream...

But the cosmic forces that guided the comet were callously indifferent to the cries of Mankind. Several fragments of the comet, the largest measuring over four kilometres across, crashed down onto the planet, scouring enormous craters, devastating the landscape, provoking gigantic fires, and terrifying tsunamis. Colossal clouds of black dust shot up into the atmosphere. The air became chokingly hot and dry. Millions upon millions of people perished in the cataclysm, and millions more met the same fate in the weeks that followed.

For the survivors, a new age of chaos and desolation had just begun, the age of Dark Earth.

## CLIMATE

*"... I made my way slowly over the glutinous earth, head hunched, my dogskin cloak pulled up around my neck to protect my throat from the damp, dustladen wind. I kept my eyes fixed to the ground for fear of falling unwittingly into one of those deep ditches brimming with icy mud. But even so, I tried to walk more quickly. With only a few hours remaining before total darkness, I had to hurry back to the Stallite if I wanted to have the slightest chance of seeing the light of the Sun God ever again..."*

The cataclysm caused dramatic changes in the Earth's climate. Besides the total destruction of the lands around the impact zones, the fires caused by burning detritus and

the giant tidal waves, some things have changed for ever. The Black Shroud, the cloud of dust that hangs in the sky, has made the Earth a cold, dark world. Away from the shafts of light, the temperature rarely rises above 10°C in the equatorial regions and can fall as low as -40°C at night in the former temperate zones. Storms of black hailstones regularly beat down on the caravans of the bold nomads who travel the roads from Stallite to Stallite. The rain is also black and sometimes acid, so exposure must be kept to a minimum.

Deprived of light, most plants were no longer able to photosynthesize, condemning many herbivorous species to death and reducing the amount of oxygen in the air.

As the ground is covered by powdery, grey dust, dust storms are no rare occurrence. Asphyxia is the punishment for those careless enough to get caught in a storm.

One of the gravest dangers is still the deposits of bubbling, pulsating dark substance that pepper the desert regions. It is said that a fate worse than death awaits any who touch it and live...

After the cataclysm, many dormant volcanoes became active once more, and from time to time blow out wreaths of smoke, clouds of ash and rivers of lava.

Worse still, several nuclear power stations and waste processing plants were destroyed in the disaster, inundating vast swathes of land with radioactive dust. These regions and those with strong concentrations of a strange dark substance, have been christened "Deadlands" by the inhabitants of Dark Earth.

## **THE FLORA AND FAUNA OF DARK EARTH**

*"... The dog lay in wait, silently, hidden among the clumps of grey-headed fungi. Now and again, a bird landed on one of the big mushrooms, tearing off a few rubbery pieces before flying away. The dog did not budge. He knew he had no chance of reaching the bird before it flew off. After a short time, however, its eye was caught by another movement in among the sparse vegetation, a fleeting glimpse of tawny-grey fur, scuttling between two small, blackish plants. His nose began to twitch, his muscles tensed under the black hair of his legs. He waited a few more seconds, then sprang. His victim, a fat, furry rat, had no time to react. With a snap of the jaws the dog broke the rat's neck before guzzling it down. A meal, but not enough. He raised his head and sniffed before settling down patiently to await his next prey. He had not done badly today, all things considered, but no doubt tomorrow he would have to find a new place..."*

The cataclysm had dramatic consequences for all the Earth's flora and fauna. The fires and floods devastated certain regions of the world beyond hope of recovery. But the

greatest damage to the plant kingdom was done by the cloud of residual dust that prevented photosynthesis.

Only the hardiest plant species have survived, some algae, and also lichens and fungi, now some of the main sources of food for humans and animals. The only remaining chlorophyll plants are those that can survive with little light, and are dark in colour, ranging from brown to black, contributing to the sinister air of desolation of the wild Darklands. A few Stallites have greenhouses where a few plants and flowers subsist in their original form. On Dark Earth, the gift of a rose is a rare event, reserved for the privileged few.

As may be expected, the disappearance of a large proportion of the vegetation has wreaked havoc in the food chain. Every animal, from the smallest to the largest, suffered terribly in the wake of the cataclysm. The large herbivores, such as horses, cattle, and elephants, were the first to die, in their tens of millions. Due to the cruel shortage of prey, carnivores also died in great numbers. Omnivores were perhaps the ones who fared best, but still many of them died of hunger, cold, or disease.

Many animals, such as birds, monkeys, apes, and rodents, also died because the bushes and trees in which they lived were destroyed.

While some species of insects had an easy time living on wilting and rotting vegetation, the good times did not last long. However, thanks to their incredible ability to adapt, insects and arachnids soon got used to the new climate. Most of them now live deep underground. The ones seen most often in the cities are ants, spiders, and scorpions, and certain mutant species are widely feared because of their deadly poison.

In the first few years after the cataclysm, birds were able to survive in the stale air because of the proliferation of insects, but with no trees to perch in and no landmarks for migration, they were forced to change their way of life. Now, most of them live around the Stallites and settle on the buildings. Humans leave them alone, since birds have been divinized by the cult of the Great Solaar. Travellers who look at a Well of Sacred Light from afar often see hundreds of birds flying endlessly round and round, as if trying to reach the Sun God.

Most animals have reverted to the wild and are ruled by their instincts. However, there are still some domesticated or half-tame dogs in the Stallites. Now and again, people will have a pet snake or even a cat. Some Stallites are famous for the tame bears owned by the Guardians of Fire.

## **THE PEOPLE**

*"... I am Ruel, Guardian of Fire in the Stallite Dohymion. With ten other men, I guard the*

*North Gate. I have not been a Guardian for long. They gave me this job when Hulvar Regtorn did not return from an expedition into the Darklands. But they say I am doing well. True enough, there is no-one quicker than I am at lighting the lamppoles that blaze around the city walls. While I was on my rounds yesterday, a small group of nomads arrived at the gate. I could see on their faces that their journey had been hard and that they were relieved to have reached the safety of the Stallite Dohymion. Their eyes rejoiced with the pleasure of light, their skin with the pleasure of warmth, their mouths with the pleasure of laughter. There and then, I understood how much more agreeable my life was than theirs. I lifted my eyes in silent prayer to the Sun God, asking him to keep sending us light and warmth against the darkness..."*

### Physical appearance

The men and women of Dark Earth are mostly of medium height and fairly stocky. Their skin is fair (even the skin of African peoples is now markedly lighter) and their eyes are pale. Most people can see in the dark, at least to some degree, and they have developed great resistance to cold and toxins. Their muscles are fine and firm, and though they eat little, their bodies store the fat to protect them from the cold. For the same reason, they are also hairier than their ancestors.

Their clothing is of varying type and origin, but rarely in good condition - life is hard and materials are in much shorter supply than in earlier days. Animal skins and furs are used, as are old, very hard-wearing fabrics left over from Before, also wool, cotton, and linen in the regions where these crops have survived.

While the Lightdwellers, the inhabitants of the Stallites, can wear fairly light clothing, those who venture out into the Darklands, especially the nomad "Wanderers", are swathed from head to foot in the strongest, warmest clothing possible. The Wanderers often wear rudimentary sunglasses to protect their eyes from the sunlight, particularly after a period spent in the Darklands.

### Political and social organization

Most of the descendants of the survivors have gathered for protection in the Stallites where they have built fortified camps, sometimes on the ruins of old cities. They are known as Lightdwellers.

The others, called the Wanderers, have chosen - or been forced - to take to the road, travelling from Stallite to Stallite in search of riches, ancient treasures, or simply somewhere to live. Most of them will find only a violent death at the end of a difficult life.

Although the Lightdwellers are often wary of the Wanderers - some of them are banished criminals and others have returned from their journeys unnervingly changed - they need them for their supplies of building materials and other commodities. And admittedly, many Lightdwellers admire the Wanderers for the courage and adventurous spirit.

### Organization of the Stallites

Though the Stallites are of very different shapes and sizes, they are organized in the same general way.



The Stallites are surrounded by a protective wall, a wooden fence, or a stone wall, designed to protect the city from intruders or wild beasts from the Darklands. Besides their physical defences, the Stallites also enjoy mystical protection of the Mystic Guardians. Most of them are still buried in the ground, but some have been partially or completely unearthed. The Sunseers have declared them to be sacred object and it is forbidden for anyone apart from them to touch them.

In the middle of the Stallite stands the Great Temple, the nerve centre of the city of light. The Great Temple is generally the largest and most impressive building. While the structure and shape of the Temples vary from city to city, all of them are brightly lit. During the day, a ray of light from the sky crosses the centre of the Temple. The faithful prostrate themselves before the Rahal, the symbol of the Sun, suspended in the light. The Company of the Guardians of Fire, a massive, squat building, is usually not far from the Great Temple, generally next to a well. Other, smaller companies are situated along the ramparts.

The rest of the buildings and houses are arranged differently from Stallite to Stallite, with fields and orchards generally situated around the edge of the city.

### *Castes and professions*

The population of the Stallites is generally divided into five distinct castes or groups. As religion has taken a dominant place in human civilization, the Stallites are governed by the priests, the Sunseers, assisted by their strongmen, the Guardians of Fire. Next in order come the Builders and the Providers, essential people who account for just over half the population. The Scavengers are the rabble of the Lightdwellers.

### *The Sunseers*

The Sunseers are the priests of the Sun God or Great Solaar. Their prayers and offerings are given up so that Great Solaar will continue to smile on the cities of light. They also teach the Lightdwellers to worship the Sun God and ensure that everyone takes part in the ceremonies as befits their station.

They are also the guardians of science and knowledge. They provide medical care and teach reading and writing.

Their clothing, which may vary from one Stallite to another, is always light-coloured. It attracts light and reflects it back, illuminating the souls around it. Even more than the rest of the population, the Sunseers love quartz and crystals, using them as decoration and for jewellery.

The Council of the Seven, presided by the Great Prôneur, rules the Stallite. It organizes food distribution, collection and cleaning expeditions outside the city walls and, when necessary, sits in judgment of the crimes committed within the Stallite.

The Sunseers have absolute power inside the Stallite. The population accepts the fact (though not always gracefully) insofar as the Sunseers are the guarantors of light and there is nothing worse than the shadows of the Darklands.

### *The Guardians of Fire*

The Guardians of Fire can be considered to be the "right hand" of the Sunseers. They are

strong, practical men, used to being out and about, whereas the Sunseers rarely leave the neighbourhood of the Great Temple. They are in charge of security inside the Stallite and of keeping watch over the perimeter to ensure that no intruders can get in.

At night, it is their task to keep the huge torches burning that light up the city, on the ramparts and in the most thickly populated areas. They light the huge braziers around which the people of the poor districts gather to seek warmth; they also supply torches and fuels to those in need. A specialist branch of the Guardians of Fire, the Oilmen, press certain types of plants to extract a thick oil which makes excellent fuel. For instance, a bowl of roueg oil (from a black plant that is also used to make fabric) will burn for several hours.

The Guardians of Fire are also in charge of the FaRaha, a system of mirrors set atop the highest buildings and which can send a powerful ray of light sweeping across any part of the Stallite and can also be used to signal to Wanderers heading for the city from the Darklands.

Some of the most highly placed Guardians of Fire still know how to use and repair electrical circuits. Others try to invent new ways of producing light and making it last. If there is a fire, the Guardians also act as firefighters.

### *The Builders*

The builders are the workers and craftsmen of the Stallite. They construct and maintain all the buildings in the city, make sure that the city walls are sound, and make furniture and tools for the Lightdwellers. The miners working in the salt, coal, and mineral mines are also Builders. They are tough men, used to danger and death because they often work in the Darklands.

The Sunseers centralize and distribute the fruits of the labour of the Builders. Builders are obviously given some of the nicest housing and will have the best possible furniture and household goods.

### *The Providers*

The Providers are the farmers and hunters of Dark Earth. They have the difficult but vital task of tending the few fields and orchards within the walls of the Stallite, raising cattle, finding game or even recovering food from Before (cans, freeze-dried foodstuffs) from the ruins all around. The Sunseers demand a contribution from each of the Providers, which is then redistributed to the rest of the population. The Providers can then do what they like with what is left.

### *The Scavengers*

The Scavengers form the majority of the poor population of the Stallites. Some of them are simply too old or too young to be part of another caste. Others are invalids, or incapable or unwilling to pursue any productive activity.

The Scavengers manage to survive by sifting through garbage or scouring abandoned or ruined places to find anything they can use to barter for food, a warm place or a little light. Some Scavengers live by burgling and thieving, even though they will pay a high price if caught (being banished from the Stallite by the Sunseers is almost the same as a

death sentence). Others take the risk of volunteering for the exploration expeditions organized by the Sunseers, which venture out of the Stallite and are sometimes gone for weeks.

### Religion

The cult of the Sun God, Great Solaar, or Father of Light, is the central pillar of human society on Dark Earth. The only remaining islands of civilization all stand on sacred site protected by the Sun God. In each of the Stallites, the Sunseers, the priests of the Sun God, have complete control over the lives of all the inhabitants.

The Sunseers' creed is simple. The Sun God protects Mankind against the Darkness. He is the fount of all life, to be feared and respected. The Sun God is considered to be an almighty being who sees everything that men do. He brings light and life to those who worship him, while those who offend him or his servants will be consumed by fire.

It is said that when men have cleansed and purified their souls and the Earth, the Sun God will send his children to rid the world of the Black Shroud. Darkness will be banished for ever more and the whole planet will be bathed in the life-giving light of the Sun God.

The symbol of the Sun God is a white circle from which descend three vertical bands, like rays of sunlight. The symbol is to be seen in various forms on all religious objects. The Sunseers shave their heads and paint them with the sacred symbol, the central band reaching down to the chin, and the two lines either side down to the cheek bones. This is to show that the Sun God is master of their thoughts, sees through their eyes, and speaks through their mouths.

Because of their closeness to the Sun God, to whom they have devoted their lives, the Sunseers are considered to be holy and are revered by the other inhabitants of the Stallite. They regulate the lives of the Lightdwellers, distribute food and goods, deliver justice. Just one word of the Sunseers is enough for a man convicted of a crime or of blasphemy to be banished to the Darklands with his entire family. Which, more often than not, means they are condemned to die.

The Wanderers are less religious than the Lightdwellers. Nevertheless, most of them would still say that they believed in the Sun God. How else can you explain these great wells of daylight that pierce the Black Shroud?

Many bands of Wanderers have a mystic amongst them who helps sustain the faith of his companions. And whatever they may personally think, the Wanderers need contact with the Sunseers too much ever to go against them.

### Changing times, changing ways

Owing to the harsh living conditions after the cataclysm, Mankind's mores, manners, and principles have changed considerably. Deprived of the comforts and safety of technology, men's instincts quickly took over. Only the hardest

were able to survive the catastrophes, the diseases, the rarefaction of oxygen, and the food shortages, and gradually adapt to the new world. In this wild, savage, unforgiving environment, men became hardened. If need be, they can be merciless. But they have also learned to appreciate the benefits of togetherness and the value of human life.

### Communal life

A solitary existence is a precarious thing on Dark Earth. Men soon came to understand that, in order to survive, they had to share their knowledge and skills and live together to be able to subsist and defend themselves. Even the most unsociable Wanderers travel in small bands. The only exceptions are the lone hunters, a few mystics who have taken a vow of solitude, and those who have been stricken with contagious diseases and head off alone to die in the Darklands... Alone, that is, unless they find the mythical Clan of the Damned, a group of nomads whose members, according to legend, are all diseased, disabled, deformed, incurable, or crippled.

### Life in the Stallites

Each Stallite is different. Some were built on open land, others on the ruins of pre-Cataclysm cities. The Sunseers, Guardians of Fire, Builders, and Providers often have solid stone houses. The Scavengers, however, live in abandoned buildings, shacks, or old underground shelters.

The Wanderers live in thick tents that look a little like Indian tepees. When travelling, they carry their tents on their backs or put them on a cart, setting them up at every stop if they have not managed to find a safer or more comfortable refuge.

### Food

The diet of the people of Dark Earth is considerably different to the food of pre-Cataclysm days. The staple food is the big mushrooms that grow almost everywhere around the Stallites and in the Darklands. They also make soups and stews from roots and savoury plants. For meat, they eat rats, mice, snakes and some of the larger insects. Besides the few cattle and pigs bred by the Providers, hunters sometimes bring back wild boars, bears, dogs, or some other wild animal. This type of meat is rare and is reserved for special occasions - or for the most influential people.

The Providers who tend the land are able to grow various fruits and vegetables, though these cannot be compared to those available Before. Unfortunately, there are never enough to go round, which means that only a privileged few ever get to taste them.

To drink, there is water from the springs and wells, filtered through fine-mesh sieves. The water is often polluted, but the Inhabitants of Dark Earth have become resistant to it over the years. Some Providers distil a strong alcohol from mushrooms, and a few people are lucky enough to taste ancient drinks, dug up from the ruins of the cities of Before.

### Conjugal life

Given the short life expectancy - people rarely live beyond the age of 50 - and the high infant mortality rate, couples form at a very young age, around 15 or 16. Polygamy is thought to be quite natural and is encouraged by religion in some Stallites. Women, who are often just as hard-boiled as men, are paid great respect, and their maternal role is considered all-important. While they are unlikely to tremble with fear when faced with a band of marauders or an angry bear, most women are struck with terror at the thought of being sterile. On Dark Earth, sterility is a source of shame and a loss of social standing. The birth of a child is always greeted with pride and is an occasion for great rejoicing.

### Childhood

Up to the age of three, children are pampered and protected as much as possible from the rigours of the climate. They are the future of the human race and adults will do all in their power to help them. Despite that fact, infant mortality remains high.

A child officially reaches majority at age 12. A religious ceremony is held, which places the child under the protection of Great Solaar and makes him either a full citizen of the Stallite or an active member of the clan, depending on whether he is a Lightdweller or a Wanderer. Once adult, the child must do his share to keep his family alive and become part of the social group to which he belongs.

### Death

When a man dies, custom dictates that his body be burned so that his soul can go to join the Sun God. Leaving the body of an enemy to rot in the open air or, worse still, to bury it, is the surest way to condemn his soul to perdition.

If the cremated man was righteous, his soul will rise straightaway to join the Sun God. If he was a heretic, his soul must roam the Darklands for ever. If he has sinned but has repented, he will have a chance to reach the sun by being reincarnated in the form of a bird.

For that reason, birds are considered to be sacred and inviolable animals. To harm a bird or eat its flesh is a mortal sin, a crime against the Sun God. However, the Wanderers (and starving Lightdwellers) rarely keep this commandment, to the great horror of the pious.

### Education

The only school on Dark Earth is the school of life. However, those who can read and write are greatly respected, as are those who still retain scraps of the culture of the days Before. In the Stallites, and to a lesser extent in the Wanderer clans, there are often people who are prepared to teach children and other adults in exchange for food and lodging. The Sunseers, the guardians of knowledge, also teach reading and writing, but devote most of their time to the future members of their own order.

### Art

Given the inhospitable conditions of life on Dark Earth, Art has become a

secondary consideration, but it can still be found in the work of some craftsmen, such as goldsmiths and metalworkers. Most of the metal used has been recovered from the ruins of the cities of Before, and is worked on anvils or with blowlamps. Another material in no short supply is bone. Animal or, more rarely, human skeletons are used to make jewellery, small decorative, or useful objects, and so on.

Music has also survived the cataclysm. There are flutes, harps or, much less frequently; musical instruments from Before that have miraculously survived. The songs tell stories of the golden age of Before or the adventures of one of the heroes of Dark Earth. Horns are used to sound the alert, as their powerful notes carry far.

### Crafts

Some of the most widely respected Builders are the glassmakers. They work almost exclusively on religious artefacts for the Sunseers: glass tables, windows, sun symbols, etc. Given the amount of fuel and energy required to produce glassware, the glassmakers' creations are very highly valued.

Like glass, crystals are also very highly prized by the Inhabitants of Dark Earth. According to popular belief, crystals and quartz are the tears shed by the Sun God when the cataclysm occurred.

Wood being rare, carpenters and cabinet makers have been replaced by metalworkers and welders. In most Stallites, metal is widely used. It is the most resistant material and the one that suffers the least deterioration. Chromed and polished metal are wonderful for catching and reflecting the light of the Sun God. Sculptors and masons also have the wherewithal to work. The techniques of working with stone are a mixture of knowledge from Before and experience gleaned since the cataclysm.

There are also bone sculptors who mainly produce small artefacts such as jewellery, knives, cups and so on.

The craft of weaving also survived the cataclysm, but the materials are different from those used Before. Animal fibres are rare; the fleeces of domestic and wild sheep are generally used to make blankets or for collars and coats. Vegetable fibres are the ones most freely available. A tough, stringy plant called roueg is used to make hard-wearing but terribly rough clothes.

### Technology

Although some hypersophisticated equipment survived the cataclysm, the level of technology of Dark Earth has fallen extremely low. The secrets of how to operate the most complicated machines and devices were lost in one or two generations after the disaster, the survivors being too busy in clinging on to life to bother about "useless" skills. At present, only a few people still understand about electricity and know how to maintain and repair simple machines. But in Stallites all around the world, there are always a few inquisitive souls who seek to understand and use the almost magical technology of Before, such as electricity or internal combustion engines.

Despite the presence of these relics of Before, daily life has returned to the

Middle Ages. Fire is used for heating, lighting and cooking. Clothes are made from vegetable and animal fibres, tanned skins and salvaged materials (non-degradable plastic, metals).

Power is supplied by natural energy: wind engines, paddle wheels, steam engines, etc. Coal and mineral mines have been reopened, and the work is often difficult and dangerous, but the energy that they provide is extremely precious. Most of the vehicles are drawn by animals - tamed bears, dogs, oxen - but some ingenious inventors have developed wind-powered vehicles which sometimes work very well.

### Trade and barter

On Dark Earth, money has no currency, except in certain Stallites that have their own coinage. Trade is based on barter. All material goods are traded in this way: food, fuel, lighting, clothing, weapons...

The objects with the greatest value are durable sources of light left over from Before: portable generators, electric lamps, oil lamps, etc. But these are often in the hands of the Sunseers. Firearms are also highly prized, as is ammunition. Next in value are clothes, manufactured weapons (daggers, swords, crossbows), game and drinking water, foodstuffs from Before and finally everyday objects •

## **THE DARKLANDS**

The Darklands is the name given to all the lands that lie outside the Stallites, beyond the ramparts and the perimeter of the Well of Sacred Light.

98% of the Darklands is uninhabited, as life there is extremely hard. Only the hardiest of wild beasts roam its desert wastes. But these lands are also haunted by the creatures, more dangerous than the most savage of beasts.

The Wanderers, the men who travel the Darklands, linking one Stallite to the next, always have many terrifying tales to tell about the denizens of the "land of shadows" that they have met or fought against. According to some of them, there are black fortresses in the Darklands, built and inhabited by extremely aggressive and violent men.

### The Monasteries

Creatures are not the only population to live in the Darklands. Human refuges, called Monasteries, are tiny glimmers of hope in the darkness. These are small citadels, protected by strong defences (moats, ramparts, spikes, double gates) and armed men. In these Monasteries, communities of Sunseers are sometimes to be found, coming to the aid of travellers seeking sanctuary. A number of Monasteries are used as bases for expeditions to destroy the creatures and Shankcreatures. Also in the Darklands are buildings occupied by miners, in areas where the mines are too far from their home Stallite, and prison camps where life is particularly difficult.

## **DARKNESS AND LIGHT**

On Dark Earth, life follows the rhythm of alternating darkness and light. The Inhabitants of Dark Earth have mystical explanations for the cycle of day and night and other cosmic phenomena.

For them, day following night, night following day is the materialization of the never-ending struggle between the Sun God and the forces of Darkness. Each night, many people believe that dawn will never come. But each day, the victorious sun reappears, and with it the life-giving light.

Inhabitants of Dark Earth see sunlight as a gift from their god. Its mystical character is reinforced by the violent winds that blow each day as the air warms up.

The stars that can be seen at night through the holes in the Black Shroud are the distant flashes of battle between the Sun and Darkness.

The moon, which is only seen occasionally, is considered to be the messenger of the Sun God, and sight of it is deemed to be a good portent for the Stallite over which it floats.

When the first glimmers of light appear in the black dome of the sky, prayers are said to thank the Sun God for bringing light and heat back to his people. And as night falls, all kneel before the symbol of the Sun God to ask his forgiveness for their sins and the return of day after night.

The heat-stroke, sunstroke and loss of vision that beset the Wanderers who are not used to the light of the Stallites are interpreted as mystical signs. That is how the Sun God tests the Wanderers who dare to step into his sacred light. Those who come to be able to protect themselves from the effects of sunlight and are accepted by the Sunseers are then allowed to become Lightdwellers. •