

# Nations of the World

## **The Empire of Mechtadorf -**

**Capital City:** Korolburg

**Geography:**

**History:**

*Founding*

*Recent History*

**Culture:**

***Languages*** – Imperial Low-Variant, Medium-Standard, Imperial High-Standard

*Imperial Low-Variant* is the umbrella term given to any version of Imperial Standard that have become entwined with one of the native Eshi languages. Despite the fact that imperial decree outlawed any Eshi language over three hundred years ago, Low-Vairant can be found being spoken in many rural towns and hamlets.

*Imperial-Standard* is the most common language spoken in Mechtadorf. Imperial-Standard is a utilitarian language, designed to have simple grammatical rules and an emphasis on non-overlapping synonyms. When Mechtadorf was expanding the Imperial College of Language decided that semi-educated serfs made for far better city workers if they could all speak and read the same language, thus a simplified version of Imperial High-Standard was commissioned, and the native Eshi dialects were outlawed.

Three hundred years since its creation, Imperial-Standard is now used in all parts of Mechtadorf and in many countries beyond. When the automated printing press was invented, Imperial decree ordered that all citizens have at least one copy of *The Imperial College's Dictionary* in their homes. In cities such as Koroldorf copies of the latest edition of the dictionary have become a common tenth birthday gift.

*Imperial High-Standard* was once the exclusive dialect of the Starshi peoples. After their conquest of Mechtadorf it underwent further refinement, cultivation, and change, before developing into the language that it is today. Imperial High-Standard contains many complex grammatical rules, and a much wider vocabulary than commonplace Imperial-Standard.

Imperial High-Standard is the language of the royalty and nobility in Mechtadorf, being the language used in many plays, novels, and musicals. The upper echelons of imperial nobility often test their influence by inventing words or idioms to drop into conversations, then seeing how far they can influence the vocabulary of the time.

## ***Government***

*The Sovereign* – The Sovereign holds absolute power in Mechtadorf, acting as it's highest authority, it's highest judge, and it's highest priest. Mechtadorf was founded on awe to the absolute power of the Sovereign, making their word the final one on matter of military, fashion, morality, cuisine, governance, and everything in between.

The Sovereign rules for fifty five years, three months, and five days, after which they make the Great Sacrifice, and their heir takes up their rule. Traditionally, each Sovereign produces an heir at the age of twenty one, meaning each Sovereign usually takes up the role at the age of thirty four.

*The Sovereign's Great and Most Noble Sacrifice* – The Starshi tribe originally dwelt in the East of the lands that would later become Mechtadorf. An industrious people by nature, they had chose to settle on the bank of the Blessed River Redde. At this time the Starshi ruled the wealthy city of Korolburg and it's surrounding farmlands under the guidance of the Korol King. With wealth flowing into their lands, the Starshi people eventually turned their eyes westwards, to the lands of the Eshi tribes.

Constance the Great, the Korol King of the time, had traveled far from Korolburg in his youth. He had visited the Dwarves of the Three Great Peaks, spoken with the Centaurs of the vast planes over the Eastern Mountains, dissected countless Cat and Crow people, and held council with the greatest mages the world had to offer. His people were thriving, with good harvests and prosperous trade flowing into their land. One night, as the cold winter was passing and the stars had foretold a temperate summer was on the way, he held council with the Korolburg nobles on the terrace of his great palace. The arranged nobility spoke until the early hours of the following morning, with Constance asking each in turn what he could do to leave his mark on the history of the Starshi people. Not expecting the question, each of those gathered was unable to give a satisfactory answer, suggesting petty things such as building another tower or commissioning a greater statue. It was at the height of this meeting that a shadowy figure emerged at the door to the entrance of the grand terrace. Thinking it was simply another one of his nobility, Constance bade the figure to stand at the back of the queue of those offering up their suggestions. Constance sat listening to each plan and idea, sinking into a deeper frustration with each voice that spoke. The King had traveled far and seen the hunger of the other people's of the world, and now, looking at his own, he could see they were sinking into comfort and passivity. It was only after Constance had dismissed each noble that the figure stepped forward. The sun was rising over the horizon, and Constance had almost begun to doze in his chair. He opened a single eye, shooting up straight as he saw a black furred cat folk standing before him. The cat smiled, the early morning sun rising directly behind it. Suddenly awake, the King thought for a moment about whether he ought call his guards, but seeing that the cat posed no threat, decided to listen to whatever this interloper had to say.

The cat had a simple proposal. It pointed west, to the Eshi lands and it's untapped farmlands, it's rich mineral deposits, and it's forests filled with fine wood. Constance nodded in agreement with the stranger, having seen many of these things in his travels. The cat offered a simple deal: Free it's people and the land would fall under the rule of the Korol King. Upon hearing this the King recoiled

and turned up his nose. Cat folk had been fine slaves since Korolburg's founding, and an easy source of ritual materials; releasing them would be madness. He was about to dismiss the strange feline, though as he raised his hand to give the command, the cat jumped up close to him. Speaking words that Constance had never heard, the cat waved its hands and a heavy sleep overcame the monarch.

When he awoke, the Constance as atop a great brass tower, overlooking the Eshi lands from many thousands of miles up. Surrounding him were figures clad entirely in white, wearing fine steel armour that had been carefully finished to look a beautiful brassy-gold. Below, though he did not realize it at first, he saw people. From where he was they had seemed less than specs, their collective mass merging together in his vision into a wave of ever so slightly shifting smudges. Looking carefully, Constance began to make out individual shapes in the crowd, and as his ears adjusted he began to make out words. There were praises below. Vast crowds were praising his name. Above, Constance could feel a warmth emanating from the sky. Something was watching him. Something divine. Something beautiful and powerful. In his preternaturally long life, magically extended and kept in a state of near constant youth, the King had never felt anything as real as what he was currently seeing. He was about to speak, to address the crowd and receive their adoration, that the sights faded and he found himself sitting in his chair. The cat stood before him still, a knowing smile across his muzzle.

From that moment Constance knew what he needed. He would return to that place, regardless of the cost. The next day he decreed the cat folk would be free. Over the following year the Starshi amassed an army the size of which had not been seen in many hundreds of years, ensuring each warrior had the finest quality equipment available, supported by many hundreds of great mages, priests, and war beasts. The King prepared to wave farewell to his wife, children, and family, promising he would eventually return to rule from Korolburg.

It was a full three years before Constance first campaign ran into any real resistance. Weary and lazy from the string of easy victories, his forces became lax in their duties, allowing their blades to dull and a sense of lethargy to wash over the armies camps. It was at this time that a group of Eshi arose to rally the people in a single unified force. Having watched the Starshi for many years, the Eshi realized that the Starshi partook in nightly rituals to the coming of the moon into the night sky. It was during one of these rituals, when Constance soldiers were most distracted, that the Eshi warriors attacked. Caught unaware, and being out of practice, the campaign's forces were reduced by four fifths. The Eshi heroes found Constance deep in worship near the center of the camp, making a cowardly attempt on the King's life as he knelt on holy ground. Almost immediately the King's guards reacted, holding back the Eshi as they were cut down. Constance himself fled from the scene, rallying his men and organizing a skillfully executed retreat back into consolidated Starshi lands, retreating Durseme forest to the town of Redeselde.

Reports came that similar events were playing out across the campaign front, forcing Constance to change his forces to a more defensive stance. In the years that followed the glorious campaign had turned into a defensive war, with the Starshi only expanding when they thought it would grant a tactical advantage. Meanwhile, Constance followed the party of Eshi throughout the Durseme forest, successfully killing the skilled illusionist who had been so skillfully covering their tracks. Convinced that his forces would finally be able to hunt down the Eshi, Constance ordered the pursuit to head deep into the Durseme.

Unbeknownst to Constance, the Eshi had already moved silently back through the Durseme, and began to move deep into Starshi lands. Constance and his forces searched the entire Durseme forest, finding no sign of the Eshi heroes as they moved further westwards, the search growing more desperate as time went on. It was when winter began to fall that Constance realized he he faced a choice. He would either have to return to Redeselde and the Starshi people empty-handed despite many years of searching, or he could return declaring that the Eshi had been driven off back into the darkest depths of the forest, unable to make any moves without their mage. Returning to Redeselde he ordered his forces to spread out to the furthest reaches of Eshi land.

Once again, the campaign moved without any effective resistance. Villages and towns fell under Strashi rule. With his forces in high spirits Constance became more relaxed with each mile he rode from the Durseme. By the time he reached the ocean, the natural end of his conquest, he had moved the delay caused by the Eshi heroes to the very back of mind, deciding it was an unfortunate delay, but one that had been overcome. With the western shores of Eshi land claimed, and all of the territory of the south under his reign, Constance ruminated on the northern expanse, in which not even the Eshi dwelt in any great number. He would need to decide where else his armies could go eventually, but for the time being he felt the Starshi could enjoy a moment of relaxation.

It was only when he turned his attention back to Korolburg that he learned it was under siege. Much to his horror, Constance learned that the Eshi heroes had not been defeated, but had instead slipped past his armies and taken to hiding in the eastern mountains. The enraged King jumped upon his horse upon hearing this and immediately rode east, taking only the men that could keep pace with him. For twelve nights and days the King rode before he saw the spires of Korolburg. A hundred men were behind him. He sent a crow to deliver the message of his coming, though, looking down at the siege, he had greatly underestimated the strength of the Eshi. In his message he bade the nobles of the city to pray and offer sacrifice to the gods that evening, as he prepared to do the same. For the first time in a great many years Constance prayed to the gods for the strength to defeat the Eshi heroes if he were to face them in combat.

The next day, Constance and his men rode town to the walls of Korolburg, launching themselves into the heart of the Eshi army. The three remaining heroes of the Eshi were easy to spot, having been given a wide berth by their kin. As Constance rounded on them an arrow was shot from a bow, finding the throat of his horse, which crashed down into the ground. Before the King stood three warriors decorated in exotic silk cloaks, wielding weapons which sung with magical potency. Ordinarily this fight would be difficult for Constance, if not impossible. After twelve days of constant riding broken by the occasional short nap, Constance struggled to stand under the weight of his own armour. A mace smashed down into his shoulder, breaking the Kings arm before he could even unsheathe his sword. He staggered back in pain, exhaustion and anger dulling his senses, though doing little to make the pain more bearable. Using his unbroken arm he drew his sword, but through the slits in his helmet the King could see the three Eshi warriors closing in on him. Meekly, he raised his sword and thrust.

All of Constance years of training told him to expect the uncomfortable feeling of his wrist being twisted as his opponent deflected his lazy swing. The sword traveled through the air and Constance grit his teeth, almost closing his eyes so that he would not see the blow that killed him. A

sensation came across his arm, and for a moment he thought his disorientation had spared him the pain of the sword being pushed away. It must have been less than a few seconds, but when Constance had realized no blow was coming, he looked at his arm, then to his hand, then to his sword. The tip of his blade had been thrust through one of the Eshi.

A newfound strength rushed through the King, adopting a better stance as he took several wild slashes at the mace-wielding Eshi. Through several blows the Eshi did his best to block, but he too began to weaken, dropping his mace, allowing the king a vicious slash across his chest. The second Eshi fell. The last charged towards him but Constance easily dodged, cutting across the Eshi's back, then, moving from one motion to the next, stabbing into the Eshi's side. Almost disappointingly, the final Eshi fell. With their leaders slain discordance spread through the Eshi tribes. A volley of crossbow fire shot down from the city walls, Starshi voices ringing out in cheer as the soldiers on the battlements spotted their King stood among the dead Eshi. The men who had survived charging into battle with Constance, ten in total, charged from atop their horses into the sides of a group of Eshi attempting to scale the walls, blowing their horns and screaming. Constance wanted to join them, though his weariness returned. Unable to muster even the strength to hold his sword, the king collapsed, content that Korolburg would not fall.

Unbeknownst to Constance, the nobles of Korolburg had met the previous night, guided by priests. To defeat the Eshi, it was decided, a great sacrifice would be required. At first the nobles threw animals and personal trinkets into the fire, and when that produced nothing, they threw slaves, then serfs, then favored servants, then friend, then family. Among the screams the priests continued to chant, screaming to the gods that they deliver some sign that they would be blessed with victory against the Eshi. As another set of sacrifices was to be thrown into the fire, the Constance crow in the highest open window of the chamber. The god's had delivered their message.

With grim resolve, the first noble stepped forward to offer his idea, mere moments before the nobles would have suggested sacrificing one another. The Korol King, they decided, ought to be a fine sacrifice to the gods. To show their willingness to any deity who may have been watching, Constance messenger bird's wings were ripped from its body, which was then thrown onto the pyre. A brilliant white flame shot into the air and the chief priest made his promise. "You may have our king when he reaches the age of fifty five years, three months, and six days of age, and all of his blood from hereon after until the last day of the world, if you are to give us victory tomorrow." The flames roared their luminescent moonlight-white once more, then died down. This was the sign the priests had needed. The King, who would reach the age of fifty five years, three months, and five days, would be victorious, and then the gods would take him the day after.

When dawn broke the following day the populace of the city arose to greet a procession of the King and his men who would travel through the streets and back to the palace. Constance had found a new horse to ride since the end of the battle, a big black stallion which had formally belonged to one of his guards. The great beast took four steps into the city. On the fifth step, as its hoof was about to meet the ground, a stone subtly shifted, a movement too small for any of those gathered to properly grasp, but enough to twist the horse's leg in an unnatural way. A horrific neigh was heard and in the next moment the stallion's leg had been completely twisted around, causing the horse to buckle. And

collapse forward. Constance fell from his saddle, smashing his head against the road. He was pronounced dead by the royal physician that same day.

After Constance came his son, Innuriel, his natural successor. The nobles greeted the son of Constance the Great, Constance the Conqueror, Constance the Saviour, with three days of celebration, at the end of which they were invited to the palace. In a state of revelry the nobles proceeded to the feasting hall, wondering whom should claim the rights to which parts of the newly conquered territory. When they arrived, however, they found Innuriel sat at the head of the table, a scowl across his face, staring with a deep fury at each of the nobility in turn.

The Starshi nobles sat down to a banquet bereft of food and drink. It was only when a priest stepped out from one of the many doors and stood behind the young King that they realized what had happened. The priests, owing no loyalty to the nobility, had informed Innuriel of his father's fate, and what had been promised to the gods in return for victory. Shamed glances were exchanged and preemptive accusations were thrown, but Innuriel simply raised his hand for silence. If he were to be doomed to die at the same age as his father, Innuriel declared, then he would make sure the newly formed Empire of Mechtadorf would not forget who's blood their prosperity cost. He would not take revenge on any individual sat at the table. In exchange, he would be the Sovereign, and the beneficence of his family would be worshiped by all. He snapped his fingers, and order the priests be killed, and his fathers surviving guards immediately took out their daggers to stab defenseless elderly figures. The Sovereign would from then, and for as long as Mechtadorf stood, be the only authority of Mechtadorf.

Innuriel died from illness at the age of fifty five years, three months, and six days old. His daughter Ivanessa took up his throne. Since then there has been an unbroken chain of fourteen Sovereigns, making the current Sovereign, Theodor the Fourth, the seventeenth to hold the title.

*Eyes of the Sovereign* – Amongst the many agents of Mechtadorf a select few are given the honour of reporting to the Sovereign directly. Though each Sovereign varies in how many they choose to have at any given time, each of these agents are handpicked and put through years of grueling rituals, after which they officially gain the title of an *Eye of the Sovereign*.

The origin of this title understates their role, however. After countless years spent deep in the Korolburg Castle basement they become an extension of the Sovereign's will itself. At any given time the Sovereign may choose to see through the eyes of one of these agents, keeping a scrying orb bound to one at each time. Any information that enters one of these agents heads become accessible to the Sovereign, and any action they take will be transmitted by subtle magics back to the throne room. On some occasions, when the Sovereign wishes to meet with somebody in person, he may do so by sending one of his Eyes and possessing them when they reach the individual.

Each Eye is highly trained in covert, martial, and magic arts, such is the range of tasks they are required to undertake. Within their skull sits two jet black orbs in place of eyes, though they can make these appear as a regular pair of eyes at a moments notice. In older times they would traditionally wear black painted suits of armour at all times, though now a days they are commonly seen wearing white shirts under black silk suits, trousers, and ties. Regardless of attire, an agent will always have a

gleaming silver pendant crafted into the shape of an eye with a pair of swords arranged above and below it, in order to identify themselves should they ever need to exercise their authority.

Despite their many uses, Eye's are rare within the empire for the simple fact that their creation is both risky and resource intensive. The creation of an Eye is a twenty year long process, with each stage requiring a heavy investment of fine magical resources. In addition, the process itself often kills the individual undergoing it during the eighteenth or nineteenth year, making the investment extraordinarily costly each time.

*Nobility* – Throughout Mechtadorf there are countless noble families, each with a claim to be descended from an ancient Starshi ruler. The vast majority of nobles will own some kind of land or holding, on which the lower rungs of Mechtadorf society work. In between the nobility and the workers are trusted servants, advisors, and experts of specific matters who will either be younger members of nobility or the children of a common family who has shown some degree of intellect and who's education the noble has subsidized in exchange for their fealty.

Noble society follows no strict pecking order or organization, indeed, the nobility are free to organize their holdings as they see fit. Power is often dictated as much by social connections as it is by wealth. A young noble with a medium sized farm in the far west of the Empire will find themselves more respected than one with a large farm just outside of Mechtadorf if they can attain some sign of favour from the Sovereign. It is considered common decency for a noble to wear a symbol of allegiance to Mechtadorf prominently on their person at all times, to be seen at all festivals, and to always be prepared to host guests, for the Sovereign could drop by at any time, and it would be deemed scandalous if anybody were to be found unprepared for that eventuality.

Particularly ambitious members of the nobility will often go much further than the simple observance of social conventions. In an attempt to gain the recognition of those above them many noble families will send their firstborn children to serve the Empire, perhaps as engineers, as military commanders, as mages, with the most ambitious families sending their offspring to become Imperial spies.

To be a noble in Mechtadorf is to be constantly looking for a way to end up in the good graces of the Sovereign. If a Sovereign suffers an injury many nobles will pay their surgeons to replicate that injury on their own bodies. When Theodor the First lost his left eye in a rifle accident many nobles took to wearing eye-patches, or if not having their left eye's removed completely, and when Theodor had his empty socket mended through optical magics, the nobility followed suit.

### *Sovereign's Through the Ages:*

- 1 – Constance, the Great
- 2 – Innuriel, the Feastless
- 3 – Ivanessa, the Stoic
- 4 – Flarimir, the Just
- 5 – Maria I, the Cunning
- 6 – Andrei I, the Dreamer
- 7 – Vlodefir, the Cat Tamer

- 8 – Isya, Lord of the Pit
- 9 – Tsevonovna, the Dragon Slaughterer
- 10 – Maria II, the Virtuous
- 11 – Vasily I, the
- 12 – Andrei II, the Lord of all things that Walk Upon Four or more Hooves
- 13 – Theodor II, the Jovial
- 14 – Theodor III, the Stern
- 15 – Zashavin, the Cat Friend
- 16 – Maria III, the Explorer
- 17 – Theodor IV

### ***Religion***

The study of the gods is considered to be a hobby for the nobility, who have the wealth to send their children to the University of Estreding, Mechtadorf's most famed theological institution. For the majority of the citizens of Mechtadorf the gods are considered to be fickle and lazy, though occasionally sympathetic to mortals. This random nature serves to prove why it is that the words of a mortal ruler ought be considered superior to holy texts or scriptures taken from visionaries in days long past.

Within Estreding's halls it is taught that the gods are nothing more than powerful entities unsuited to serious worship. Mechtadorf theology holds that there are thousands of such entities that may have once be referred to as gods, each focusing upon some small aspect of day to day life, and who may be coaxed into providing aid in exchange for performing certain liturgical rites or in exchange for sacrifices. A shepherd, for example, may offer a few prayers to Durmuz, the god of herding, in the hopes that his flock will come in strong that year. If in the end the flock is weak, the shepherd will not blame Durmuz, but will instead most likely attempt to explain his misfortune naturally, reasoning that Durmuz simply did not care much to stop it. In reverse, if the shepherd's flock does do well that year he will likely attribute this to his own personal skill or a generous rainfall, not caring to thank Durmuz, for all the herding god cares for is the healthy flock, not the thanks of a mortal.

Whether miracles do occur is also a matter of serious debate within Mechtadorf. Some hold that when the gods intervene they may grant their followers a certain degree of power in order to act on their behalf. Followers of this belief hold that clerics of a certain god will often manifest powers relating to that god; a cleric of Az the god of fire, for example, may be able to cast a fireball spell when before they could not. Others, meanwhile, contend that the vast majority of instances of miracles are merely an individual's latent magical talents manifesting themselves. That same cleric of Az, it could be said, may only be attracted to a god of fire because of their latent talent with fire magics. Followers of this school of thought are often quick to point out that very few of the god's followers ever manifest any sort of power, and whenever a cleric does show such powers they seem to grow stronger with practice in a similar way to most mages.

*The Eshi pantheon* – Though outlawed many centuries ago, the worship of the old Eshi pantheon still exists within Mechtadorf. Confined to hushed whispers in rural taverns and ceremonies held in the dim light of night, worship of the Eshi gods has been preserved through the centuries.



The Eshi believed in five gods who cared for them deeply

## ***Art and Entertainment***

### ***Traditions***

*The Feast of the Sovereign's Sacrifice* – The most important day in Mechtadorf, falling three days before the current Sovereign reaches the age of fifty five years, three months, and five days. There is no set way to celebrate the Feast of the Sovereign's Sacrifice, or the Great Feast as it is often called.

The only commonality between each feast is the coordination of events. One year prior, the Sovereign will given an indication of the kind of Feast they desire. This may either be a vague indication, or the Sovereign may plan it out in great detail with their advisors. Once the Sovereign is satisfied with what has been planned it will be copied out by hand onto thousands of letters, each addressed to a noble household. Upon receiving this letter the nobility will spend the following year in a near constant state of preparation. Three days before the Sovereign is due to die, all but the most essential activity in Mechtadorf will cease.

What happens on these three days depends upon the Sovereign. When Ivanessa held her Feast it was a dour affair, with Mechtadorf ordered to wear entirely black clothing, to remove any brightly coloured decoration from homes, and for every individual to offer prayers to Constance the Great at least thirty times a day. When she died the next day, mock funerals were held in every town and village across the Empire, caskets filled with either mannequins, precious items, and even particularly devoted Imperial servants in some instances. These caskets were placed into stone mausoleums alongside piles of small sacrifices of precious metals, rare spices, tools, weapons, and fine clothing. When Ivanessa died and Constance the Second became Sovereign he was ushered in silently the next day.

In contrast, when Theodor the Second held his Feast, he declared that the three days prior would be filled with drinking, eating, music, and merriment. Across Mechtadorf writers and poets read eulogies to him at the head of huge communal tables where only the finest meats and spirits were consumed. Citizens were encouraged to share their wealth with one another, to decorate their dwellings, and to buy gifts for their loved ones. When it was reported that Theodor had died the Imperial College of Pyrotechnics shot out huge fireworks across Korolburg, beneath which bonfires roared and burned masterfully crafted effigies of the Sovereign. His successor, Theodor the Third, was ushered in the next day just as a marble statue of his father was unveiled in the center of Korolburg.

**Classes:**

***Divisions***

***Cuisine***

***Professions***

**Magic:**

## **Technology:**

### **Mon-Luna**

Mon-Luna is a semi-autonomous mountainous land located to the South-West of Mechtadorf, best known for its stability, unchanging nature, and, ironically, werewolves.

When Mechtadorf and other countries took wholeheartedly to the eradication of were-creatures from the lands the survivors fled into the mountains, seeking refuge. As the armies of Mechtadorf approached the remaining werewolves prayed daily for aid, not caring for what was listening. That year a terrible snow storm ravaged the peaks, making it all but impossible for any army to attack. Disgruntled but in high morale, the armies retreated to the base of the mountain ranges, preparing themselves to weather the storm and continue their attack in the spring. It came as a great shock when spring came, turned to summer, then back to autumn and winter, and the storm had not abated. A full year since the armies had reached the base of the mountain and the storm had not shown a moment of letting up. Reasoning that any werewolves who had hidden in the peaks must have died the armies dispersed, the Mon-Luna mountains fading into the back of the collective minds of the wider world.

Eighty years to the day that it had begun, without warning, the snow storm passed. Curious as to what became of the wolves an imperial expedition force was sent, well equipped for mountaineering, into the Mon-Luna range, expecting to find a few scraggy survivors hiding in makeshift shelters at most. It was with great surprise, then, that as the expedition climbed they found evidence of stonework. Not only that, but intricately decorated watch-posts, black granite floors, and doors into sizable halls. It was at the end of one of these many halls that the tangy-sweet smell of incense wafted from behind a bronze enforced wooden door. Pushing it open, the expedition found a chamber of three hundred werewolves deep in meditation, clutching prayer beads, clad in black robes, each transformed to a different degree.

When one of the wolf men finally took notice of the expedition they were taken out of the meditation chamber and into a building that resembled something one would have seen in Korolburg several hundred years prior. There were oak wood floors, wool rugs, and ebony furniture decorated with iron and silver swirls. It was clearly rather outdated, being lit primarily by torch sconces and warmed by a central fire pit, but the expedition could not deny the craftsmanship. Reports say that they spoke to a creature who had chosen to resemble more of a man at that time, offering them dark breads, mead, cheese curds, and fish. Dried meats were also offered, though the guide was keen to stress that his people did not often eat it, save for when they fell ill or on special occasions. It was over this simple meal that the man began to tell the story of his people.

The prayers of the werewolves had, indeed, been answered all those many years ago. When the blizzard hit it only did so at the lower altitudes of the slopes, leaving the upper peaks untouched. For the first few months of their isolation, the man claimed, his people fought to the death, almost coming to the edge of extinction. It was when their fighting led them down into the valleys that they found a human population, surviving by herding goats and organizing vast terrace farms in the lush plateaus that hid behind the surrounding ring of soaring mountains. At first the wolves had looked upon this and

thought they had found a fresh source of food. They had prepared to descend when a gray furred member of their kind descended from Mon-Primus, the highest peak, carrying a large scroll in his hand. This wolf, the man said, was called Elohim, and he had died many years before the expedition arrived, though his teachings lived on. Atop the Mon-Primus he had heard a voice and seen a flash of light in the sky. This voice called itself God, and said that it had answered the prayers of the wolves, and would continue to do so if the wolves refrained from their natural instincts. Elohim agreed to this, and was given a scroll containing two hundred and eighty laws, which he took back to his people.

Ever since he had spoken to Elohim, the invisible sky God has watched over the mountains and their valleys. It had said that a time would come when his storm would subside, and the nations of men would come searching, but that the wolves should bade them welcome. As if to prove his point, the man they had spoken to suddenly transformed into his large bipedal canine form, yet continued to tend to his guests with gentleness of a nurse. When the expedition descended from the mountains they relayed all they had seen to the Imperial court. Stunned by this, the Sovereign of the time, Theodor the Second, sent his eyes to meet with these wolves personally. After seeing the same sights, the Sovereign took a few days council with his most trusted advisors. When he emerged from his chambers he offered the wolves a deal: They would help keep Mechtadorf free from their feral cousins and in exchange the Mon-Luna would become a protectorate and trading partner of Mechtadorf. The Mon-Luna werewolves were also ordered never to spread their affliction to any citizen of Mechtadorf, even by accident, under pain of death, though they were free to try and tame any they found whom had already been overcome with the sickness. Upon hearing this offer the Mon-Luna werewolves agreed, turning the Mon-Luna range into an official part of Mechtadorf ever since.

Though not common, it is possible for those who travel especially in the South West of Mechtadorf to find processions of werewolves wearing black robes, carrying incense burners, and reading their holy scripture. As these priests, monks, and paladins travel further from the Mon-Luna they are more likely to assume their completely human forms and almost inaudibly whisper they're prayers.

### ***Religion***

The vast majority of both humans and wolves who live in Mon-Luna worship the invisible sky father; an eternal, benevolent spirit that watches out for all those who make a covenant with him. Due to the emphasis on denying one's bestial urges the worship of the sky god is often referred to as the *Semita Tranquilliam* by his followers.

### **The Infinite Steppes**

To the south-east of Mechtadorf lies a series of craggy mountains, formally known as the Okon Range. If one takes one of the many dangerous roads through the mountain passes they will find a vast plane stretching out past the horizon, covered in thick grass and the occasional tree.

Human eyes are, however, limited. Though many explorers have seen the infinite steppes, very few have ever comprehended just how vast they are, and fewer still have ever truly grasped how they earned their title. No imperial expedition has ever found what lies on the other side of the steppes. The longest expedition spent two years traveling south-east, and never once saw a sign of anything other than gassy fields, rocky hills, and occasional river. Within Korolburg, scholars have long argued over

the possible geography of the steppe, with theories ranging from the idea that the steppe wraps around the world, and is in fact attached to the lands to the north-western sea. Others have argued that given the shape and size of the planet, the steppes stretch down to the equator, where, at some point, the heat from the sun makes life uninhabitable. Eccentrics claim that the steppes genuinely are infinite, and that the planet exists upon a flat-plane that stretched into forever.

For the cat-folk who dwell there, the unending nature of the steppes has always been well known. Tribes who's range has never stretched to the Okon Range have long assumed that there is nothing else to the world but the eternal unchanging landscape of rough wild-grass and shrubs. Those who find being under imperial control often simply pack up and travel deeper into the wilderness, confident that they could keep walking for many generations and be confident that they will find the terrain they are used to.

The creatures of the steppes are strange, almost parodies, of those found elsewhere in the empire. Many sport longer muzzles, odd fur patterns, or asymmetrical antlers, to name just a few. Some reports have said that these adaptations become more extreme as one travels deeper into the steppes. The best piece of evidence for this currently sits in the Korolburg biological academy's great hall: The remains of a dragon longer than any ever encountered with rows of almost hair-like antlers sprouting wildly from the back of its head, and seven sets of wings sitting at strange places along the lizard's enormous body. The creature was allegedly killed several about one thousand miles from the Okon Range, and nothing else ever like it has ever been discovered.