

## **Into The Grey Lands**

A High Fantasy setting intended for Dungeons and Dragons.

Homebrew: Somewhat modified version of the Stress system (Chapter 6, p,24) and

Dangerous Magic (Chapter 7, p,27) from Darker Dungeons.

No alignment system.

Themes: Folklore, Character progression, Survival vs Ethics, High RP – Low Combat,

Environment/Mystery encounters

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### ***“This World of ours...”***

The world is not right. In myths of creation it is said that the World That Was, was a thing of simplicity and order. A plane of calm existence where harvests were ripe and forests held game aplenty. These are just myths, spoken by only wisest, or maddest, of sages. It is a world that is as merciless as it is chaotic. Chasms of great nothing divide swathes of land, mountains that were broken eons ago have shifted into inexorably floating islands. Forests hold a vicious sentience, running water can turn to poison and mercury might rain from the broken sky. Existence hangs on a thread, and everyday life is uncertain and dangerous. Nature itself is in constant turmoil, fighting against itself in eternal hope of final release, and in a world such as this, how can things live and prosper?

But life finds a way. Hovels spring up around soil that allows for farming. Fishing villages and communities that breed livestock eke out a living. Until the world decides otherwise. Just before harvest season, without rhyme or reason, crops might wither and die. Fish disappear and animals contract diseases that are without rhyme or reason. To survive, it is best to stick together, for banditry and pillaging is ripe. People will eat each other, and some of them literally do. Places where Clerics of Providence congregate, food is produced through magical means, gaining a Theocratic monopoly. Fiefdoms, lesser kingdoms, dukedoms, baronies and mogul governed micro-empires, and all manner of self-devised titles and communities rise and fall with the ebb and flow of time. Some are ruled by elective councils, others are governed by maniacal tyrants and all of the in-between. The world in large is a place of City States. To try and hold borders beyond the walls are fool's errands. But mortals enjoy their errands, and the more foolish the better. So, war and self-imposed strife is common. Villages are set up outside their walls in hope of providing livelihood for their populations. Some are successful, others should probably just give it a rest. In the lawless world between borders exist the Grey Lands, the domain of creatures apart from the mortal and sane. It is a place where mercenaries, vagabonds and nomads fight constantly against a world that shows no respite. It is a hard and fast life, but for the clever, intuitive and inquisitive, there is great potential. A life of mud stained glory and the risk to wither away in a freak accident, for that is the way of the world, and especially the Grey Lands. Everything in the end withers and makes way for something else. There is only one constant, and that is the ever-changing nature of the world.

### **The Weave, Magic, A vortex in the sky**

The Weave consumes all. Where reality cracked, great waves of pure magic make shapes like northern lights across the sky. They trail eternally to the gaping magical vortex in the sky. Supposedly, this vortex held something called a 'Moon' once; a huge stone opposing the lonesome sun. And the effects of an unstable Weave are present everywhere.

Paradoxical runes and mismatched marks of both angry bright and soothing pastel light are found in the strangest places; trees, rocks, animals and sometimes even the sky. Mortals, too, are affected. Diverging colouration of hair and eyes occur, often being interpreted as individuals of great and magical potential.

### **Planes, Realms, Overlap**

Planes? The concept of them are foreign to most mortals. Some city-bound scholars have made the hypothesis that some of the more magically potent areas are residue of what once was actually different planes of existence. Noticeable are sylvan areas inhabited by chaotic woodland creatures colloquially known as fey. On the opposite side of the spectrum, an unnatural shadow, void of ambition, joy and progress, falls upon graveyards that reach an unmanageable size. Battlefields with no clear victor and the dead left to rest where they fell, or places where wildlife has a hard time growing are all places that show signs of this shadowy phenomenon. Planes that are recognized (by those with the scarce education or experience) are the Desolate Hells, The Celestial Refuge and underlying webwork realm of the Underdark - an area impossibly vast, spanning below and connecting all of the planes of existence. Or rather, this is the theory. The facts of the matter is, for most mortals, that traveling to any of these planes is essentially impossible.

### **People and living**

Clannish behaviour and tribalism is seldom based on racial customs and prejudice. Indeed, most cultures are natural amalgamations of communities that have grown out of a need of survive, irrespective of race. Because of this, the racial traits of the different kin of the world often slot them into places where they best serve their community rather than a community based around that one race. For instance, dwarves, due to their innate understanding of stone and handcraft often serve their communities as masons and architects, while gnomes, whom are rare, often gain judicial positions due to their age, innate curiosity and attention for detail. Firstly, it is worth noting that this by no means constitutes that races don't excel in other areas, but in a world where forgoing solidarity means destruction, innate abilities are often used where they serve the greater good. Secondly, communities purely of race does exist, both on their own and as sub-groups within city states. Humans due to their short lifespan often pass three generations before a dwarf is closing in on their autumn years. This naturally breeds a setting where groups of similarly minded and biological races congregate within a larger setting. Again, this is not necessarily the norm, and it may or may not be looked down upon, depending on the overall community.

### **Faith and religion**

Faith comes in two types. The pagan and the deistic. They both follow different ideals, and while the latter is uniform all over the world, the former is wide to interpretation and often local in its practise. It is not uncommon for the pagan practitioners to pay respects and pray to God.

And there is only one God, and its name is Providence. The Priesthood of Providence teaches that there once was, eons past, a pantheon of jealous and insidious gods. As time passed, they found all of creation not to their liking and in some maddening way decided to undo it. Only Providence stood against them, and in a last effort to save reality, the God destroyed all others, assimilated their domains and spent its remaining effort to keep existence intact. Now, Providence is known as the Absentee God, for its only cause for existence is to constantly survey and keep the shattered seams of reality together. As such, its blessings are provided seldomly, and the power that its clerics and paladins draw upon manifests as a power that they are allowed to tap into rather than a blessing. Communing

with Providence is next to impossible, apart from the Hierarchy of Providence; supreme leader and voice of the Absentee God.

Paganism, folklore, elementalism, spiritualism, covenism and occultism are names used to describe the faiths that people of the world turn to when the only God is absent. Technically, the pagan beliefs are more common than the deistic faith. Many believers in God still turn to the other means of worship. In such a way, religion is not a case of inspiration, moral and ethical teachings, but rather a submissive, practical agreement or appeasement of powers greater than the common folk. The pagan practises are as varied as the cultures that practice them. The world is a highly spiritual and emotional place, and everything from ancestor worship, powerful fey, elemental spirits are turned to for guidance and survival. Clerics, paladins and people of 'divine' powers are as such often empowered by other directly more demigod like entities. The notable difference here with warlocks, however, is that whereas the warlock is an individual that bargains for power, clerics and paladins serve the intentions of that power. Druids, naturally, are extremely common since they can appease a vengeful nature and affect the outcome of a harvest and are unlike practitioners linked to some sort of patron, wielding magic linked to the earth directly. Because of this, druids are the number one heretics and blasphemers to the more zealous followers of Providence. To try and decide on what grows and how in a world ruled by God is interpreted as hubris and an outright betrayal of the world God is ruling over. A lesser does not meddle with the designs of its' superior.

*(DMs note: Religion is intended to work fast and loose and have a very folklore/weird/old faith feel, but functional practise to it. It can go as deep or as vague as the player wishes.)*

### **Rarity of race**

Races, often monikered folk or kin, differ in how common they are. Not all races are found in cities, and all cities might not be varied. Depending on the rarity of the individual, the interactions will vary wildly. The listing below is not word for word exact as different groups have different ideas and notions about races and subcultures.

**() Common - Throw a rock and you'll hit one.** In a world where life is brutal, you'll be hard pressed to run out of these geezers.

**(\*) Uncommon - You threw a rock, and to your surprise you hit one!** They are noticed simply as being somebody who sticks out in a crowd. They are not rare to see, but for every ten to twenty of a common race, you're likely to find one of these.

**(\*\*) Rare - You're gonna be throwing a lot of rocks to hit one of these.** People might look twice and be unsure how to talk to them. There are probably some preconceived notions about the race in particular.

**(\*\*\*) Scarce - What are you trying to do, throwing rocks at random like that?** People will stop and stare, word will travel and more often than not, it might be good to just stay out of sight to not attract people that might prey upon the exclusive nature of simply being born from an extremely rare stock. People go home saying *"You have no idea what I saw today..."* and might want to bond with an individual such as this simply for the merit of having exotic friends.

**(\*\*\*\*) Very scarce - You probably should've spent the odds of throwing that rock on something better, like becoming King or ascending to immortality.** People not only live their entire lives without seeing someone of this race. Folk might not even know what an individual of this race might be, or always have assumed that their kind don't actually exist. Guards get informed, shops might close or open just for the person, and people in high places will try to keep track of a person like this. They are in a way a target for persecution

and coveting, because these people might be as unusual, if not more so, than the rarest of metals and sought after in such a way.

*(DM's note: These are not hard and fast rules. They are more like 'guidelines' for the players to understand some of the implications in picking their race. 'Cuss it's fun when you roll a character that might be a bit different and you expect the world to react appropriately.)*

## **Playable Races**

### **Manfolk**

Human - Longshanks, Breedlings ()

Lightfoot/Stout Nirmman - Halflings, Shortshanks()

- Ghostwise - Otherlings, Tribelings (\*\*\*)

Half-orcs - Unfolk, Broadfolk, Tuskers (\*\*)

### **Dwarves**

Hill/Mountain Dwarves - The Adaptable, Clanfolk, Hearty Ones()

### **Elves**

High Elves - Highfey, The Knowing, Wise Ones (\*\*\*)

Wood Elves - Sylvan, Trick folk (\*\*\*)

Dark Elves/Drow - Night Hunters, Lost Folk (\*\*\*\*)

Wood/High Half-Elves - Claimed Ones, Feylings (\*\*)

- Drow Half-Elves (\*\*\*\*)

### **Genasi**

Air Genasi - Changeable, Gusters, Breezers (\*)

Fire Genasi - Hot Heads, Firestarters, Kindlings (\*)

Earth Genasi - Steadfast, Resolute, Earthlings (\*)

Water Genasi - Wet-as-ever, Slippers (\*)

### **Assorted**

Dragonborn - The Scaled Ones, Cold Bloods (\*\*\*)

Firbolg - Despite-It-All, Calmfolk (\*\*)

Orcs - Tuskjaws, Sellswords, Mercfolk (\*\*)

Tabaxi - Quirkers, Paws (\*\*)

Goliath - Giants, Largefolk(\*)

Thieflings - Hellbreed, Cursefolk, Unblood (\*\*\*\*)

Forest/Rock Gnomes - Witkin, The Inventive (\*\*)