

Chapter I:

Mannaz,

The Peoples

There is not as great a diversity of races and peoples in the Northlands as one sees in the Southlands or especially the distant Caliphate. Only humans and elves have any large representation, but even this is overshadowed by the fact that the Northlands are nearly entirely dominated by the human Northlanders. Elves, of a sort that many Southlanders would find alien and foreign, are represented by the Nûklanders, but these reindeer herders live to the north of the Northlands proper. There has been some limited interbreeding between the Northlanders and Nûklanders, creating a small number of half-elves. Most of these half-breeds can be found in the wilds of Estenfird where Northlander civilization abuts the southern range of the Nûklanders. Of dwarves, there are only the few enclaves in Halfstead and Trotheim, plus the occasional dwarf who has found his way into the household of a jarl. Of halflings and gnomes, none are native to the region, and it is rare that members of either of these races wander into the frozen and dangerous north.

Of the other common humanoid races found in other lands, these are nearly or entirely absent in the Northlands. No orcs, goblins, bugbears, gnolls, or other of the “monstrous” humanoids are present, save for the rare individual who has made the journey north. Likewise, half-orcs are rare to the point of being nonexistent, and would be considered either some form of troll-touched abomination or a bizarre specimen, depending on where one goes.

What one does find in terms of non-humans are giants, and lots of them. Nearly every type of giant, and several varieties of troll and other giant-related species, can be found in the Northlands. These large and dangerous creatures lurk on the edges of Northlands’ settlements and are a popular target for heroes and would-be heroes. Invariably, the giants of the Northlands are evil and Chaotic. The presence of these monsters has led to the birth of humans with giant or troll blood, unfortunates wanted by neither group and unwelcome in all but the most tolerant of halls. Still, a few of these giant- or troll-blooded unfortunates have managed to keep their innate evil in check and rise from the humblest of beginnings to become heroic companions in another — more proper — hero’s saga.

Peoples of the Northlands

Northlanders

The most populous cultural and racial group in the Northlands are, unsurprisingly, the Northlanders themselves. Famed for their size, cleanliness, independence, and ferocity, the Northlanders stand out among the smaller, darker people of the Southlands. Most Northlanders are of above-average height and weight for a human, though they do not exceed human norms for size. In skin, eye, and hair color they tend toward the lighter shades, though dark brown hair and eyes, as well as black, are not uncommon. Northlanders are also well known for being clean and for regularly bathing. These hardy folk see no problem with diving into a winter-chilled stream, providing they can quickly exit and get back into the warmth of a hall.

Languages

The Northlands are distant from the centers of civilization in the world, and the natives speak their own languages. Those who venture abroad know the common trade tongue of Westerling, but in day-to-day life the Northlanders speak their own language, Nørsk. The written form of Nørsk is Runic, and must be learned as a separate language. Literacy is by no means universal in the Northlands. Other languages native to the region include Andøvan (the dead language of the ancient Andøvan peoples), Seagestrelander, Nûklander (a dialect of Elven), Ulnat (language of the seal hunters of the Far North), and two secret codes of the demon cults. Beast Cult Sign is a complex set of hand/paw/hoof movements that allow communication between the various species that make up the cult. The dying cult of Althunak uses Old Uln (a precursor to Ulnat) as its own written language. It is more akin to the Kirkut language of the Shattered Folk than any other Northlander tongue.

Andøvan
Beast Cult Sign
Nørsk
Nûklander
Old Uln
Runic
Seagestrelander
Ulnat

Men and women wear their hair long and in braids, though women’s hair tends to be longer. Men, and women engaged in more-active pursuits, wear trousers, a long tunic, and shoes of wood or leather. Women’s clothing tends toward dresses, aprons, and smocks, and both genders wear several layers, especially in winter, as well as cloaks and hats. Although women occasionally wear men’s clothing, men rarely are seen in women’s clothing.

The Northlanders have two social classes: thralls and freemen. The latter have some gradations from simple freemen to the jarls. Thralls are in effect slaves and are owned property of a freeman. They are generally captives taken in raids of Seagestreland, the Southlands, or places beyond, though they are occasionally purchased from Caliphate traders. A thrall may own property and may purchase its freedom, or it may gain its freedom through heroic deeds, the decision of its owner, or rarely by vote of a Thing (though like other decisions passed by these bodies, the Thing does not enforce the freeing of a thrall). Thralls may also bring suit before a Thing, though they may not vote and have no right to speak unless so granted by the assembly. The child of a thrall is also a thrall, but traditionally owners free their thralls upon death. A rare few thralls are Northlanders who have been captured in a raid or who have fallen on hard times and have sold themselves into slavery to pay debts or simply to find food and shelter.



All other Northlanders are freemen, and by tradition considered equal in rights and responsibilities. Freemen can own property, make oaths, and vote or speak in the Thing. Most freemen are simple farmers known as bondi; even craftsmen usually pursue their professions as a side job when not farming. The common farmer barely makes enough to put something away for the next year, and can arm himself only with a light wooden shield, a spear, a long knife or axe, and maybe a chain shirt if he is lucky, but more often leather. Wealthier farmers are known as hirdmen and make up roughly a third of Northlander society. A hirdman has a large enough excess income to afford to arm and armor himself at a higher level, namely with a suit of chainmail, a heavy wooden shield, several spears, an axe, a sword, and possibly a riding horse as well. These are not to be confused with hirthmenn who make up the citizen militias of the Northlands nations and derive their name from the hirdmen who originally almost solely comprised their.

First among equals, jarls have enough wealth to support themselves and their families, but also a large household of specialist craftsmen, thralls, and skilled warriors. The most valued members of a jarl's household are his huscarls — men and women sworn into his service whose support is entirely dependant on the jarl. In effect, to be a jarl a person needs not just wealth, but the ability to convince others to pledge their lives in your service and also be able to provide for their feeding, shelter, clothes, weapons, armor, and all other things they may need. A jarl rides to war (though he fights on foot), and bears the best weapons and armor such as a heavy wooden shield, a sword or axe, and a suit of finely linked chain. Many jarls also own a longship or two — sometimes more — and regularly outfit expeditions for trading or raiding.

Lifestyle

Contrary to the belief among the Southlanders that the Northlanders are born warriors who spend their days and nights raiding or preparing to raid, most Northlanders are farmers. Wheat, rye, vegetable, and dairy farming make up a large proportion of the Northlander agricultural production. Growing seasons are short in the North, and many areas struggle to produce enough to last from one harvest to the next. Animal husbandry

is common, and in addition to cattle (considered a marker of wealth), one finds swine, geese, goats, sheep, chickens, and ducks. Horses are rare and more likely used as draft animals than for riding, and never for war (aside as a means of transport). Hunting and fishing, as well as sealing and whaling, makes up the balance, leading to a greater amount of animal proteins consumed than in other lands.

Other economic activities include logging and some mining, though aside from iron, few readily available metals are in the Northlands. Trade is a major affair, as is raiding, and brings in goods and commodities scarce in the North. The emphasis on farming is so high that, just as with craftsmen, even those who engage in other trades do so as part-time endeavors to supplement their income.

Towns are few, and even villages are somewhat sparsely distributed. Most Northlanders live in scattered communities composed of several farmsteads grouped around a central area that serves as a marketplace and meeting site for the local Thing. This helps to reinforce the independent nature of the Northlanders and encourages tight family bonds. In most ways, each farmstead is self-sufficient, and one can find the same farm raising a variety of crops and livestock.

The family is the basis of Northlander society, though a Northlander family tends to be large. The eldest members, be they male or female, govern the families, which are often composed of two or more generations plus servants, thralls, and guests. It is not unusual for a Northlander to spend a season with a cousin, uncle, aunt, or even grandparents, and some go so far as to move in and make permanent residence in a relative's household, especially when times are tough.

Women enjoy far more rights in the North than in many other lands, and are generally considered the equal of men. Female jarls are not uncommon, as well as with godi, warriors, and nearly every other profession. However, there is not total equality, for it is assumed that shortly after marriage a woman will focus much of her attention on the household and any children produced from the marriage. Still, Northlander women are allowed to hold land, vote in most Things and Althings, hold the title of jarl, and if they are so inclined, fight in the shieldwall. In fact, when it comes to women warriors, the North produces more than its fair share. It

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is considered quite normal in many regions for young unmarried women to participate in raids and other martial endeavors, and all women receive at least a minimum of training to be able to defend their homes while the menfolk are off a-viking or trading during the summer.

Buildings in the Northlands are almost entirely made of wood; even the defensive walls of towns are wooden palisades. Roofs are generally thatch, though slate and wooden shingle roofs can be found in mountainous areas or on the homes of the wealthy. Most houses, even in towns, are long, rectangular affairs known as longhouses. These are built of a wooden double frame, often with tightly laid boards that abut each other, with the area between the frames filled with sod, rocks, sand, or other material. In the northernmost regions, sod is cut and piled against the outer walls for additional insulation. Farmsteads tend to be fenced or walled with enough room for outbuildings, sheds, and some grazing area. Nearly every home has its own well, save in towns where communal water supplies are the norm. Since Northlander society tends to be rather egalitarian, even the jarls have halls much like the common longhouse, only larger and more ornately carved.

Northlanders have a well-deserved reputation as superb warriors and are skilled and cunning combatants. Cavalry is unheard of in the Northlands, and all Northlanders fight on foot save for a few degenerate Hrolf who have adopted Southlander ways. When battle is imminent, Northlanders form up into a shieldwall with the best-armed and armored warriors in front, and the rest of the formation grading down to the freemen who can afford only a shield and spear in the back. Archers, usually youths or old men, form up on the flanks and attempt to send their projectiles into the midst of the enemy shieldwall. If either side has Bearsarkers or Ulfhanders, these stand before their shieldwall and initiate the battle by throwing themselves against the enemy formations.

Spears thrust over the shields, with the front rank either keeping two hands on their shields or otherwise wielding short, stabbing blades. The two formations advance on each other. The main goal of shieldwall battle is to overlap the other formation's wall and attack it from the flanks. Another option is to break the enemy's front, though this is very difficult to achieve. The front ranks attempt to stab each other over, under, and between the shields, while the back ranks push on those in front of them, shove spears over the shield wall into the foe, or fling axes, daggers, rocks, and spears. A shieldwall battle may take hours to resolve as each formation attempts to exhaust the other and execute a flanking maneuver or breach. During this entire time, both sides are busy flinging insults and jibes at each other, and individuals are looking for not just the opportunity to gain personal glory, but are seeking out particular foes in order to resolve vendettas or blood feuds.

These same tactics are used when raiding or in battle against non-Northlanders. In a raid, the Northlanders swarm ashore and attempt to overwhelm their targets through surprise. If this fails, the raiders fall back toward their ship and set up a shieldwall, beckoning their foes to come and try it. This works especially well against the Seagestrelanders, who seem to have never tired of their own mad rush tactics in the vain hope they may overcome a shieldwall through sheer numbers.

One other tactic not often used due to the difficulty of pulling it off, is the *schweine-kopf*, or swine's head. Unlike the shieldwall, this formation is highly mobile and very aggressive. The warriors form up in a tight wedge with the best-armed warriors along the outside and the most skilled, usually a jarl and his *huscarls*, at the point. In this formation, there is less protection for everyone, but that is not the purpose of the swine's head. Instead of meeting the foe's shieldwall in line, the purpose is to hit hard and fast, gambling all that a breach can be made in the first moments of battle. Failure leaves the warriors at a disadvantage, as they must quickly unfold into a normal shieldwall to avoid being overlapped and flanked by their foes.

At sea, Northlanders attempt to turn the fight into a land battle by ramming enemy ships, linking ships together with boards and chains, or otherwise counteract the unstable nature of the sea and the general lack of effective ranged weapons in Northlander forces. More often than not, sea battles devolve into fierce single combats as warriors board each other's vessels and attempt to slaughter all on board.

Government

To the eyes of outsiders, the Northlanders live in absolute anarchy. Unlike the peoples of the Southlands, no governmental institutions are capable of enforcing laws beyond the reach of a ruler's own household,

nor is there a layered bureaucracy like in the Caliphate. Instead, the Northlands are governed by a combination of tradition, democratic assemblies, and charismatic personalities. Northlanders view themselves as free men and women, differing from their thralls and the enthralled peoples of other lands. Every person has the right to self-determination, and if the local Thing or jarl seeks to encroach on this freedom, they better have a convincing case or be ready for a fight. In short, the Northlands are governed by consent of the governed, at least in theory.

Tradition is the main force keeping the Northlanders together, and even a weak jarl can rely on the force of tradition to maintain some semblance of order in his lands. It is because of the traditional obedience to jarls that most Northlanders treat the commands of the local jarl as words to be obeyed. A person could decide, at least in theory, that his jarl is unworthy of their allegiance and swear oaths to a different jarl. This is rare, for the first action in such an event is that a person must break his oath to his current jarl, something that flies in the face of tradition. To keep one's word is the cornerstone of Northlander tradition, and oath-breakers are despised, even when they have just cause. Likewise, lying is seen as an abomination, especially to one's companions, jarl, or during a Thing.

Other traditions govern Northlander society, but most especially the traditions of hospitality, community, and courage. Both a guest and a host are bound by the traditions of hospitality, sometimes called the laws of hosting. A guest is bound to obey his host, to defend his host's house in the event of attack, to graciously receive whatever food and lodging is available, and to behave in an honorable and sober manner. He is not to abuse his position and overindulge in the best of the host's food, drink, shelter, gifts, and thralls. The host also has several rights and responsibilities, for he is to provide for the guest the best of his house and, if lacking in anything, to make good the discrepancy even at great personal loss or risk. He is to defend and protect his guest, treat his guest as an honored member of the household, and provide for the guest's entertainment. Guests are allowed to stay for at most six weeks or the length of one winter, after which the guest overstaying his welcome negates the traditions of hospitality.

Community is of grave importance to the Northlanders, and it is a general assumption that neighbors will help neighbors in need, though this should never be exploited or abused. The people of a community, be it a jarl's hall, a family clan, a village or town, a farming district, or the crew of a longship (or even a band of adventurers), form one body. Share and share alike is the key motto, for those who share hardships and joys must also share food and shelter as needed. A great deal of property in the Northlands is communal land. Most longships, for example, are owned by a jarl and his *huscarls* or by the crew as a whole. A community commonly owns even valuable items such as ploughs, livestock, and mills.

Finally, of the cornerstone traditions of the Northlands, the one that seem to impress Outlanders the most is that of courage. Every Northlander is subject to this tradition, and men, women, and children are expected to be courageous in the face of danger or even simple embarrassment. To show fear is to show oneself to be less than human, and thus risk being excluded from the community. This is not just courage in battle, but stoic resolve against sickness, injury, accident, or misfortune.

The traditions of the Northlanders are not written down; instead, they are commonly held beliefs that have been passed down through the generations. Because of this, and because of their love of freedom, the Northlanders have developed the Thing, a democratic body that serves as arbiters of tradition, as well as makers of laws and passers of judgment. The exact composition of a Thing depends on local tradition, but in general, it is made up of either all adults in a given locality or all adult landholders. Everyone in the Thing has an equal vote and an equal right to speak before the assembled body. Most Things assemble monthly or seasonally, though the Things of Halfstead and other larger towns meet on a weekly basis. The Thing is empowered to pass rulings on any crime brought before it and to pass laws declaring actions that should or should not be taken. It has no power to enforce these laws, though for large public works projects, a Thing may take up a collection to see that a wall, canal, or such be built. Because of this, justice is often in the hands of those who wish to seek it, but the ruling of the Thing as to the legality of taking that justice is of paramount importance in avoiding a feud of revenge.

Family and clan are more important to the Northlanders than Things or jarls and form the basis of the nations *Gatland* and *Hrolfland*. These

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are part of the tradition of community, for family or clan is seen as one community that often cuts across other communities. A family has a head, and this person has many of the same duties and rights as a jarl. Above the family is the extended clan, and the leader of a clan has great influence and prestige, the right to command others of his clan, but the duty to protect the clan as a whole and see to its prosperity.

Finally, there are the jarls, charismatic rulers who govern through a combination of influence, prestige, bribery, and force. Technically, outside of his or her household, the jarl has no true authority. Individuals take oaths to obey a jarl and serve his needs, and it is up to the individual to fulfill this oath. A jarl attracts followers through the power of his own personality and through deeds. Simply being the heir of the previous jarl does not mean that anyone will follow you; however, tradition leads most people to make oaths of allegiance to their jarl's heirs, though there are always those who prefer to wait and see how the new jarl behaves before making these oaths.

In return for an oath of service, a person expects that his jarl will protect him and reward him with gifts. It is of utmost importance that a jarl be known as a ring-giver, one who frequently gifts his followers with hacksilver, goods, and land. If a jarl fails to fulfill his responsibilities to his followers, he is assumed to have broken his word to them, and thus his own oaths are no longer binding. In the most extreme cases of rebellion and banditry, a jarl may be forgiven for using force against his own people. In all other cases, unless so empowered by a Thing, a jarl that uses force to back his commands is considered a tyrant, an oath-breaker, and an enemy of the people.

One other layer of governance exists in the Northlands, though it is so closely tied to tradition that it forms a subset of the traditions of community. In some areas such as Hordaland, there is a tradition of a *køenig*. This ruler can be best seen as a higher jarl, one whose sphere includes the entire region. Like a jarl, the *køenig* must rule with the consent of the governed, but unlike a jarl, a *køenig* has far broader powers. A *køenig* need only obey the Althing of his region, lesser Things have no binding power over him. Furthermore, a *køenig* may call all of his followers to war without their consent, and they are honor-bound to obey. Finally, a *køenig* may exact a tax on all within his domain, though this may not exceed one piece of hacksilver per person per season.

Religion

Much like the rest of their society, the Northlanders do not follow an organized or hierarchical religion. They have their gods and heroes, and the worship of them is up to the individual. There are priests, but these are part-time positions that do not produce wealth in any appreciable amount. Instead, priests, called *godi*, are afforded a great deal of respect, but are also expected to see to their own affairs as any other freeman. Because of this, all *godi* have a regular occupation, often farmer, which provides a more profitable means of support. Also, *godi* tends to be an inherited position that passes from father to son or mother to daughter depending on the family. *Godi* are required to maintain their temples, called *godi houses*, that are normally simple affairs of wood and thatch. Those that avail themselves of a *godi*'s services are expected to gift the *godi* a reward of some sort. However, aside from funerals, births, and deaths, most people are content to worship in their own ways and in private, thus limiting the need for the *godi*'s skills.

Godi do not dedicate themselves to one deity, except for a few rare individuals who have felt a specific calling. These specialized *godi* are normally the only ones who gain access to spells; other *godi* may be of the cleric or druid class, but would consider the granting of a spell from their deity to be a momentous event. Likewise, only those dedicated to one deity ever gain supernatural powers from their god. More on religion of the Northlanders can be found below.

Magic

Arcane spellcasters are extremely rare in the Northlands, to the point of being largely unheard of save in story and myth. Trained magic-users from afar are usually tolerated, but all consider it best to keep such wizards far away from good, normal folk. Among the Northlanders themselves, "sorcerers" and "witches" are greatly feared, and are often declared outlaws and hunted down. The only exceptions to this general distrust of arcane spellcasters are the "cunning woman" lineages, whose daughters

are treated as honored and valuable members of the community.

Alchemy, being a science of more civilized lands, is unheard of in the Northlands. The Northlanders would not ordinarily perceive the art or its products as magical, so potions and other such items are not considered evidence of witchcraft.

The divinely inspired classes are rare and poorly represented in the Northlands. Few *godi* actually have any sort of spellcasting ability, and those that do are clerics or druids who have dedicated themselves to a specific deity instead of the Northlander pantheons as a whole. Paladins are even rarer, as only one deity of the Northlanders has the requisite temperament to attract and empower these paragons of virtue.

Nûk, Nûklanders

Beginning at Neiuburg in Estenfird and reaching north to the Endless Glacier that marks the edge of the world lays Nûkland, the land of the Nûk. Invariably, the Northlanders know the Nûk as Nûklanders despite their claims that this name is a mistranslation (a more correct translation would be "People of the Reindeer"). The Nûklanders are a different race than the human Northlanders, a race that foreigners would describe as elven. The average Nûklander is short, slender of build, and dark of skin and hair. They have long faces with small, broad noses, pointed ears, and eyes possessing slightly folded lids. Nûklanders have a second, inner eyelid that is transparent and seems to serve to protect the eye from the sun and cold, but also gives them the look of perpetually staring (Nûklanders rarely blink). Despite their slight build, Nûklanders do not suffer from the great cold of their icy homeland; indeed, they tend not to feel the cold at all due to their innate resistance derived from their inherently magical nature.

While the Northlanders consider the Nûklanders to be natives of the area, they were in their present range when the first Northlanders wandered beyond the Wyrn Fang Mountains; the Nûklanders are in fact rather recent settlers. Nearly three thousand years ago, a new god appeared among the elven peoples of a distant land to the south. This god proclaimed he would lead his followers to a place of eternal sunshine, vast fields, and endless game. Many scoffed at this boast and called this new deity a demon, devil, or scam. A few chose to pay homage to the new god, and soon a cult formed around him. As the cult grew in power, it came into conflict with the more established elven religions. In time, this conflict transformed from simple arguments to repression of the new cult.

The Forgotten One, whose name the Nûklanders and other elves have stricken from all record, encouraged his followers to strike out against those who would oppress them, and the nation was rent in civil strife. The traditional elves won out, and the cult fled north, traveling thousands of miles and slowly working its way to the "promised land." In the frozen reaches of the North, they entered a land that has endless daylight for half the year, but night for the other half. Vast fields of heather and flowers filled the land, at least when it was not covered by fields of snow and ice. Game was abundant, at least part of the year, but became scarce when the winter winds blew in. In their rage at this betrayal, the less-enthusiastic members of the cult turned on their leaders and in a night of slaughter ended the worship of the Forgotten One.

Trapped in the frigid north and facing their death, the small group of former cultists found themselves cast out by the elven gods. Seeking some aid in this new and barren land, they called out to the night. Not to be seduced by evil as they had before, the Nûklanders pleaded with those their people once worshipped, the spirits of the land, of the sky, of the water, and of the beasts that dwelled in that frozen waste. These spirits answered their call. To this day, the Nûklanders have adhered strictly to the worship of the spirits of nature, fearing any reference to a single god may again lead them into evil and corruption.

Lifestyle

The Nûklanders are hunters and herders of reindeer, supplementing their diet by gathering wild plants. They are nomadic, traveling as far south as Three Rivers in the winter and heading to the edge of the Endless Glacier in the summer. In addition to providing food and hides, their reindeer are also used as mounts and beasts of burden. Many of the tribes follow a migration route that takes them along the coast, where they prey on seals, walrus, and other sea life that spends its summer on land.

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Although famed basket weavers and leatherworkers, the Nûklanders do not work metal, make pottery, or build permanent structures. Their tools are made from bone, wood, and stone, though trade with the Estenfiranders and other Northlanders has introduced metal tools and ceramics into the Nûklander culture. Their homes are conical lodges made of hide with wooden supports, and a whole family from the youngest child to the most respected elder shares one dwelling.

Despite this apparent paucity of advanced technology, the Nûklanders are well known for their handicrafts. Clothing and other leather goods are richly decorated with dyed quills (though beads are becoming popular as trade has increased) and intricate embroidery. Jewelry made of bone, shell, feathers, ivory, and amber are commonly seen. A sign of hunting prowess and courage among the Nûklanders is to bring down a mammoth and place its carved tusks as frames around the entrance to one's tent. These huge pieces of ivory feature detailed carvings that tell the story of the mammoth hunt and are kept only for the life of the hunter. In times past, these tusk displays were burned with the owner's death, but now the always-pragmatic Nûklanders trade them at Nieuburg or Three Rivers for metal goods, beads, and "exotic" foods such as dairy, bread, and alcohol.

Arcane magic is greatly taboo among the Nûklanders, and the handful of arcane-wielding Nûklanders are met with oppression and violence. Because of this, the arcane arts are almost entirely unknown, and they have no native form of such magic. The nature-oriented spellcasting of druids and the spirit-magic of shamans, however, are well-respected: every tribe has at least one shaman or druid who can call upon the spirits of the land in order to heal their fellows, find game, and defend the tribe. Clerics are effectively absent from Northlander culture, but visiting clerics are not treated with the deep suspicion that a magic-user would encounter.

Nûklander society is based around the extended family, and it is not unusual for several generations to share one lodge. They practice polyandry and polygyny, each family choosing for itself how many men and women will make up its complement of spouses. Children are raised communally within the family, with much of the childcare performed by the grandparents. Multiple families form tribes that migrate together and share the tasks of managing the herds (which are held in common). Tribal life also allows the Nûklanders to let some of their people perform specialist roles such as shamans or reindeer-mounted warriors.

Government

It would be easy to say that the Nûklanders lack governments of any kind, and for the most part this is true. The idea that one person can command the obedience of many is foreign to them, as it is largely foreign to the Northlanders as well. There is no Nûklander equivalent of a jarl, much less a kœnig. Decisions are made in councils that include all adult members of a tribe, and once a decision is made, it is up to the individual if they are going to follow it or not. Beyond the tribe, there is no higher authority, and no one speaks for the Nûklanders as a whole.

Religion

It is to the spirits of the land that the Nûklanders turn for divine aid and spiritual comfort. To a Nûk, the gods have turned their backs on them, but the simple spirits of the natural world will never forsake them. Animism is very strong in this faith, and every type of animal or plant, as well as natural features and events, have their guardian spirits. These spirits generally keep to their own spheres; a wolf spirit is concerned with wolf things, not bird things. The tribes' shamans are tasked with interceding with these spirits in order to placate them or request their aid, though every Nûklander knows some simple prayers (these are not spells, just minor forms of worship).

Seagestrelanders

To the southwest of the Northlands proper lies the Seagestreland, a forested band that stretches between the shores of the North Sea and the vast plains of the Sea of Grass. This forest, and the plains beyond, is home to hundreds of warring tribes known collectively as the Seagestrelanders. These tribes are human, but of a different origin than the Northlanders, speaking several different languages, and possessing a very different

culture (in fact, several different cultures). Despite the variations, the Seagestrelanders are all one people to the Northlanders, just as the Southlanders are considered one nation despite the plethora of kingdoms that make up the Southlands.

It is difficult to describe the average Seagestrelander, as there is truly no such thing. The vast majority are smaller in frame and stature than the towering Northlanders, tend toward equally pale complexions, but have darker hair and eyes. They are human, and number few mixed-races among themselves, having no half-elves or half-orcs, and rarely producing a giant- or troll-blood child.

In times past, the Seagestrelanders wandered north out of the southern expanses of the Sea of Grass, likely pushed out by the then-expanding horsemen of the Hundaei tribes. In their northward migration, some groups settled along the Dnipir River, while others took to life in the forests and along the coast of the North Sea. Others stayed on the plains and took to a mounted nomadic lifestyle similar to that of the Hundaei that drove them from their ancestral homes.

With the coming of the Northlanders, the Seagestrelanders found any further expansion north, east, or west blocked, and soon saw their coastal villages raided and plundered. Yet other Northlanders came and offered to trade for amber, gold, and slaves. It is this last trade commodity that started the constant warring among the tribes, as neighbors raided each other in order to sell their prisoners to the Northlander traders and hopefully stave off raids against themselves by wild vikings. This did not help, as the various groups of Northlanders had no central authority to stop the raiding. Thus, today the Seagestrelanders treat every approaching vessel with fear, for until they see if the dragonhead is set they do not know if this will be a fight or an exchange of goods.

The Seagestrelanders desperately need this exchange of goods, for their land is poor in mineral wealth and their metalworking skills are less than those of the Northlanders. Strange beasts and fell monsters abound in Seagestreland and on the Sea of Grass beyond. Warfare is constant between the tribes, and the advantage that well-forged weapons and armor gives can mean the life or death (or often enslavement) of a tribe — not to mention aiding in defense against vikings coming in from the sea. Furthermore, trade goods can be exchanged to Northlanders in return for aid in some battle or conquest, a practice that has often led to Northlanders fighting each other on behalf of different Seagestrelander tribes. As the Northlanders have begun to move up the Dnipir River, this need for better armament has become all the more important.

Lifestyle

In general, Seagestrelanders pursue three main lifestyles: farming, fishing, and herding, with cattle, horse, and sheep being the most common livestock. Along the forested coast, the former two go hand in hand, and most tribes practice both in roughly equal measure. Along the Dnipir River, farming is the most popular occupation of the tribes, while out on the Sea of Grass it is herding that dominates. Hunting and trading, as well as raiding, heavily supplement all three.

The forest and coastal Seagestrelanders, as well as the farmers along the Dnipir River, build sturdy wood and turf houses occupied by an extended family and their livestock. On the plains, wool tents replace these, and the hardy livestock is welcome to live outside. All the tribes practice various decorative arts that range from embroidery to carving, though stone and metalworking are rare skills and not highly advanced.

Magic of any sort is even rarer than it is among the Northlanders, though the Seagestrelanders make no distinction between arcane and divine magic. All magic is from the gods regardless of its source, and the local priest might be a sorcerer, oracle, or cleric for all the Seagestrelanders care — all magic is a gift from the gods.

Religion

The gods of the Seagestrelanders live in each village inside a god-tree, a single massive tree trunk carved or painted to represent the gods of that tribe and village, or with a hollow in the trunk in which the tribe's tibaz idols are placed. It is here that communal worship takes place, and the local priest usually lives adjacent to it. The dead are cremated, and their ashes scattered on and about the god-tree. The god-trees do indeed have magical powers, which vary from one to another. Some have powers that