

The World You Live In - A brief guide to Alair in 2100

The world in general

Alair is a generally Earth-like world. Although there is around the same amount of landmass as earth, only a certain amount is familiar to the inhabitants of the region your character comes from, and this is referred to as *Known Alair*.

Known Alair is divided roughly into four parts. The Northlands include most of the mountain ranges of Known Alair, the Trakar Swamps, and the countries formerly under the dominion of Varkar Barduric. Much of the northern reaches are now a dragon-haunted wasteland known as the Drachenfels. In the centre of the known world is the forest kingdom of Belámir, restored home of the Elves. The Southlands comprise all the lands once part of the Erlyid Empire. The Deep South starts with the Red Dust Tract and extends away out of common knowledge.

Races

There are six main races to be found in Known Alair; humans, elves, dwarves, orcs and lizardmen.

Humans are by far the majority, and fall into two broad groups; 'northern' or 'Norton' humans who tend to be tall with fair or brown hair, pale complexions and light-coloured eyes, and 'southern' or 'Erlyid' humans, who are shorter and darker, with brown hair and eyes being the most common. Humans are the most versatile of the races, at home wherever they may find themselves, and reproducing faster than any of the others.

Elves are taller, slimmer and more graceful than humans, ancient magical beings generally far more in tune with nature. Rather than having a predictable lifespan, elves live as long as their fate lasts, some for little more than a century, some for millennia. There are several subgroups; High or Noldor elves tend to live in cities and build structures of stone (although far better integrated with the environment than anything humans build), and comprise most of the nobility of the elves; Wood or Sylvan elves are less serious and structured in their lives, and live rural lives in forests wherever possible; Sea elves are actually just members of the first two types who have taken forever to the waves and live aboard their great ships plying the western oceans; Wild elves are wood elves left behind when the species fled (see History) and reverted to a more primitive lifestyle. Related are the Fae Mhor, the outcast dark elves who traded their lifespans and ability to live in the sunlight for dark and evil power in the service of the demoness Lolth.

Dwarves are a short, immensely sturdy race of strange dwellers under stone, miners and craftsmen, staunch friends and implacable enemies, never forgetting a debt or a slight. Most are Mountain Dwarves and live in one of three vast cities under the Erean Mountains, but a smaller population of Hill Dwarves, slightly less irascible and aggressive, live under the Ndrall mountains to the south.

Orcs are a created race. The foul and unpredictable god Gruumsh made them with the intent of creating the perfect warrior species; as adaptable as men but more aggressive and physically powerful. His vision was flawed, however, and the orcs' aggression and self-loathing prevented them ever co-operating for long. Orcs are frequently welded by strong leaders into temporary empires that then collapse again after their deaths.

Their alliance with the human Erlyid Empire has changed them, and some lived within that empire as nearly-equal citizens. After the orcs returned from the Empire to their ancestral fortresses, the Orc hero Gorfang Deathdrinker welded the race into a single empire, the Gorfangach. Though the empire did not long survive Gorfang himself, the orcs remain in their cities and pose a constant threat to civilization in the east.

Lizardmen were originally a race of barely-sentient creatures living in the Trakar swamps in primitive villages and raiding occasionally into the western Northlands. Some of them were genetically modified by the Dark Dragon Varkar Barduric to create a race of soldiers for his conquests, and these more advanced creatures have achieved a higher level of culture than their feral ancestors.

Other races of note include the following: Centaurs, man-horse hybrids from the Asedor forest; the giant armoured panserbørne bears from the arctic wastes north of the Engeror mountains; half-orcs and half-elves; Varkar's mighty offspring by a variety of different races collectively called the Kin; the slitheren or ratmen, most successful of the Curst creatures spawned by the Desolation. Other planes of existence are home to far more strange and wonderful peoples.

Languages

The earliest human language was that of the Erlyid people, and its simplest form remains the *lingua franca* or Common Tongue of most of Alair today. The humans who live in the north use their own language, Norton, as well. The nomads of the Red Dust Tract speak a different language, Thalrath.

The elves speak elvish, an ancient and beautiful tongue, with each branch of the race having a slightly different way of using it. The exception are the Fae Mhor who speak a completely different language, of which a debased form called Undercommon is used by other races in the netherworld in which they live.

The dwarvish language, Khuzdûl, is angular and blocky like themselves, a harsh-sounding tongue and difficult to learn.

Orcish is even more harsh than dwarvish, and has fewer words for anything wholesome. Unlike dwarvish, it is so corrupted between different tribes that orcs are often driven to use Common to communicate between communities.

Lizardmen speak Krultac and claim it is the ancestral language of all dragons. They usually learn Common or Norton to communicate with humans when not raiding them. Some of the lizardmen of Dalaghendor speak other languages as well.

History

Alair has a long and turbulent history.

The Age of Legends: Initially, the only sentient inhabitants were the elves, who set about exterminating the worst of the monsters that roamed free in those days. The Fae Mhor separated and vanished into the shadows.

The Age of Mortals: After the arrival of dwarves, then men and finally lizardmen, times were relatively peaceful – except for a short war between Men and Elves, the only such – until the advent of the Dragon.

The Age of the Dragon: To all but the elves, dragons were merely myths, held to have been legends even in the Age of Legends. The arrival from the north of the vast, aggressive and above all clever dragon Varkar Barduric was thus an enormous shock. To his physical powers and considerable magic Varkar added a genius for strategy. Warping the fairly simple lizardman race into something far more advanced, he conquered the Northlands one by one, brutally crushing all resistance. He routed the orcs from their ancestral homelands and drove them south past the dwarf cities to the edge of the Empire, where they struck an alliance with the humans. After a period of preparation he turned on the elves in a series of ruinous wars that drove the proud eldar to the edge of extermination, forcing them to flee Alair in secret and hide for a thousand years while they grew strong again and the rest of the world forgot them. All their lands were laid waste and transformed into a vast desert called the Desolation by Varkar's magic. He bred prodigiously with any race he could, creating the varied and powerful creatures known collectively as the Kin. In 1600 by the Erlyid calendar, he was poised ready to invade the Southlands – now calling themselves the Free Kingdoms – across the Desolation. At this point the seemingly invincible Dragon was several times balked and eventually slain by a small band of heroes from the past, wielding the lost sword of a dead elven hero. An army of elves, returning from their exile, broke the Dragonarmy and sent it into retreat. Varkar's empire promptly flew apart as the one thing preventing the Kin from fighting each other – fear of the Dark Beast – was removed and a great scramble for power ensued.

The Age of Warlords: With half the world up for grabs, everyone with an ounce of power involved themselves in the struggles of the new Age. The Northlands dissolved into a crucible of war and ruin, some prospering, some laid waste altogether. Kin warlords seized parts of the surviving Dragonarmies and carved out what territories they could. An event of massive religious significance, triggered by a Hero of Kord, created a vast nexus of faith in the city of Karennal and eventually gave rise to the Kordasa, an expanding theocracy. The elves and orcs returned to their ancient homes and began to reconstruct them with better defences. The revival of lost and ancient gods of Khabra in the deep south and the appearance of the Triad in Stryre began to destabilize the religions of Alair.

The Holy Wars: The rivalry between the followers of old faiths and new ones, and older ones reborn, escalated in a series of ever more devastating wars, culminating in the catastrophes of the Ritual of Flaying and the Elf Death. At this point the Gods themselves stepped in and forged a pact to scale back the hostility before all the faithful could be lost.

In the wake of these events, mighty kingdoms and empires are no more, and wide areas of Alair are uninhabited wasteland dotted with ruins. Some lands are rebuilding and exploring anew; some new kingdoms are springing up among the ruins of the old. Your characters live in this world.

The Nations of Alair

A brief description of the major lands

Northlands

Drachenfels: Centred on Vorsand where Saryn Darrath holds the city, a deserted region dominated by the dragons formerly enslaved by the Kin wizard Skuffruss Lord of Dragons

Minensal: City-State on the edge of the Drachenfels, last remnant of Skuffruss' realm of Tarlanor. Famed for Dragonslayers.

Kordasa: Theocracy of Kord centred on the miracle site in Karennal, largely human. Glory and goodness perhaps taken too far. Much reduced by the Elf Death.

Trakar Swamps: Murky swamps on the north-west coast, home to lizardmen and other things, the Deep Trakar is a mystery. Few return from investigating its' secrets. What was Dalaghendor is slowly returning to the swamps.

Tellare: Restored from the ashes of the conquered Tellare by Surya Wyrmslayer, a strong, dynamic and warlike kingdom. Their principal export is aggro. Much reduced by the Elf Death, Tellare remains the largest kingdom in the Northlands.

Enning: Still ruled by the prescient Kin Thelvia Tyrkor, an atheist realm famed for its horses and cavalry, and ejecting Kordic missionaries.

Gadûhvrás: Once capital of the Gorfangach, now another orc-hold with a mighty past. No-one knows all its' depths.

Kîshshul: Ancient orc-fortress, once part of the Gorfangach, site of the only known *mithril* mine in Alair.

Gloiran: Dwarf city, the first founded, guided by the Goldeneye, returned to pre-eminence after some difficulties.

Kobur: Dwarf city, rulers changed in a succession of un-dwarflike coups, the richest dwarf city. Birthplace of Hildraft.

Nisur: Dwarf city, after a mass kidnapping by mind flayers in the 1650s, dwarves from here tend to be more suspicious and untrusting than most. Main export is coal.

Derran Howe: Founded in the Erean Mountains south of Nisur, a refuge of hill dwarves fleeing the effects of the Flaying on the Ndrall.

Midlands

Belamir: The reborn elf homeland. Shattered by a religious civil war in the 1900s, most of it is now the Scorpion Empire following the dark God Sabath. A small enclave of Loyalist elves holds the area around Lomegor.

Belegond: Once the elves' port city, now a free port for all trade and travel, prospering mightily, rather lawless. Largely untouched by the Holy Wars, it alone has expanded rather than shrinking.

Southlands

Stryre: Once an Imperial Province, now a free nation and proud of it. Many tales start here.

Nhased: Once the Theocracy to the One and home of religious intolerance. Effectively destroyed by the Ritual of Flaying, though a tiny remnant clings on in the north. Most is now uninhabitable cursed wasteland.

Erlyid Empire: After the fall of the Empire in the wake of the Flaying, a vast wasteland of haunted ruins and occasional villages, unaware of the greatness in the shadows of which they live.

Djasrem: A kingdom carved out from Southern Stryre by invading Red Dust nomads, now a blended nation of both peoples and cultures, and not entirely settled down.

Red Dust Tract: A desert wilderness populated by wild, hardy nomads who breed the best horses in the world and fear and distrust red-heads.

Others

Viridor: Exile island of the elven race, fortified and restricted.

Underdark: Sequence of massive caverns below Alair, home to the Fae Mhor among others.