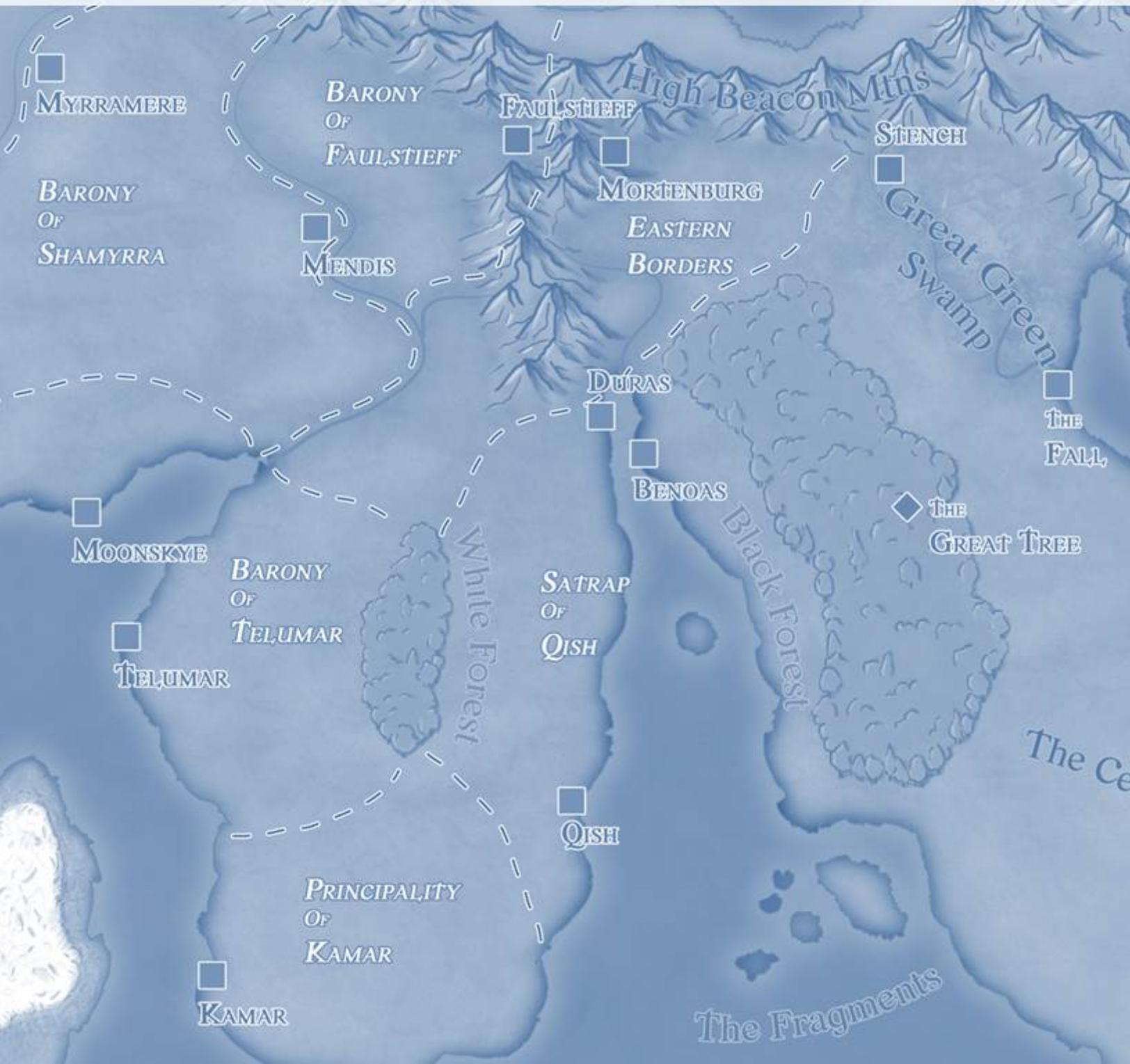


TIKHON

A Guide For Wanderers



Tikhon

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Che Webster

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With thanks to our contributors: Mark Denham, Pete Fenner, Dave Laithwaite, Ian Roberts, Oliver Rogers, Jon Russell and Scott Templeman.

Dedicated to my ever-patient wife, Deborah. Thanks for putting up with the funny dice, funny smells, and odd noises on a Friday.

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Glimpses of the Wider World

The Flat World

Imagine, floating in the depths of some unknown dimension of space, a pentagonal body of land from the edges of which fall the waters that flow ever outwards from the centre.

Picture the lone ball of fire which, in eternal kindness to the peoples of this place, orbits across the sky above this pentagon; each night, as the elliptical orbit carries it below the horizon, this sun plunges down underneath the plane of land. Having been washed by the falling waters at each edge of the land, the sun arises again each morning – clean and bright.

In a similar fashion, imagine the moon which also orbits this realm in exactly the opposite sequence to the sun; arising as the sun dips below the horizon, the moon too falls through the waterfalls and is made shiny and fresh ready for the next night. Only the bright souls of the Ascended lighten the night sky in addition to the moon, but these are dim by comparison to the luminescence of the Queen of the Sky.

Of the waters of Tikhon, it is said that they are drawn down and towards the centre of the pentagonal plane underneath the lands. Philosophers and prophets tell of the Engine of Creation which sits below the world, drawing all matter and energy back into itself before pushing it back up through the centre of Tikhon – an endless loop of flow and dynamic mystery. Such is the power of this Engine that not even a single droplet of water escapes into the void.

Of Adventure

Tikhon is a world filled with diverse peoples. Although many folk choose a life of relative ease, seeking to maintain farms and safety, some others are restless. These few, although perhaps strange to the majority, take great risks as they choose a different path – a road to adventure and the discovery of greater things.

The world is immeasurably old. Evidence of lost civilisation, and the fallen heroes of latter days, litter the world. In ancient tombs or through the ruins of desolated settlements, through this mystery of ages past roam those who would seek to uncover the secrets of better days.

You will take the role of one such hero. Or fool.

Forgotten Things

One of the great truths of life upon Tikhon is that, seemingly inexplicably but perhaps by means of the magicks that flow across the world, knowledge is wont to be forgotten.

Each Age of Civilisation ends through cataclysm, dimly remembered by the survivors; yet, as each New Age dawns, memories of the past fade. Knowledge is forgotten as the need to survive and rebuild takes precedence. None except the Druids of the Weaver can speak confidently as to the reason for this, and even the Druids keep their own counsel.

Of course, for the adventurer, this mystery drives you to purpose. What are the secrets of the past? Can you recover some artifact or knowledge from the ancients with which to attain notoriety and power? What wonders await you in the depths of lost places?

Recent Matters

Mystery aside, there are some things which *you* can speak of. Recent history dwells large in the minds of the educated, and drips from the lips of the commoners.

Some 400 years ago saw the end of the Old Empire. This colossal civilisation had conquered almost all of Northern Tikhon and stood opposed to the strange and powerful Magi of the Fey. Although wrestling with the Fey for decades, it was the rise of the Church of The Lightbringer, those servants of the Sun God, who delivered the Empire from this struggle.

Crushing the outposts of the Fey, liberating the Northern Draxian Kingdoms, and freeing the captive realms of the Nyhi saw the Lightbringers stand victorious. Only then did the Empire begin to decline.

Without the war that had united the peoples for more than a thousand years, the Empire began to turn upon itself. Civil unrest grew into rivalry. Eventually, the Emperor's own family turned against him and an irreparable rift flew into a continent-spanning conflict.

It was the Magi, learning the secrets of the Fey, who ultimately cost the Old Empire everything. Channeling vast and unfettered power, the Magi from all sides of the war razed cities and changed the very form of the world. Even as the peoples cried out, and died in writhing terror, there were few who could oppose the spells of the Magi.

Thankfully, just as the magicks of the powerful destroyed the realms, the spells also took their toll upon the Magi themselves. In time few were left to cast anything magickal at all.

And the Old Empire gasped its last.

And the Barons took hold of what was left.

And the peoples began to build something new.

A Brief History of Northern Tikhon

Greetings to you, most illustrious Baron Jarek Stieff of the realm of Faulstieff, from your ever-faithful servant and historian Kasimir of Mortenburg.

In these latter days, as the tide of fear in the wake of the Old Empire's fall has ebbed, it has become possible to consider creating a brief account of the events that have led us to your current reign and the positive relationship that the Barony of Faulstieff has maintained with the free peoples of Mortenburg. In this brief letter, then, I seek to outline the major events that it would be beneficial for us all to remember, lest we fall into a new dark age of ignorance. With your forbearance, my Lord, I ask that you consider this humble record as worthy of addition to your great library.

Of The Ages Of Men

None can be sure, my Lord, of the number of great historical Ages through which Men have endured. As a species, we are new to the face of Tikhon and we have had a turbulent reign. Prior to the coming of the grim Fey, and the consequent rise of the Old Empire, it is hard to be precise. What is known, however, is that there has been more than one great empire of Men: on the evidence of ruins and subterranean delves alone it is possible to identify perhaps three more periods of significant Mannish rule and civilisation. We historians, in our hubris and imagined importance, seek to codify these "Ages of Men" as follows.

Of The Pre-Times

Of the unknown ages before the Bronze Warriors we know only that the lands, wild and untamed as they certainly were, were inhabited by the most crude of civilisations: the great hordes of Goblins, Orcs, Giants, and other fell beasts who have never truly learned to settle. The earliest evidence suggests that the modern city of Stench may be built upon an ancient settlement of the Goblins which has survived unending time, in its own fashion of splendour.

What we know, however, is that the first and oldest races are those of the Goblins and Orcs. Theirs is the claim to the land should you wish to give it in accord to longevity. of course, these nomadic and bestial creatures of Chaos cannot be relied upon to tell the truth or share their history; despite having language and pictorial records, the evidence would suggest that they were taught this by the Drax or some later civilisation. Of their true history, none can be sure.

Age Of The Bronze Warriors

Prior to the Drax, even before the great delves were struck, we know of the Age of the Bronze Warriors. We know little about their culture and even less about who they were. Yet, as most historians would agree, the evidence seems to suggest that these were the first Men.

Clad in bronze armour and fighting against the brutal Goblins, Orcs, and Giants, the Bronze Warriors built for themselves a civilisation in the area east of Mortenburg, beyond the great swamp and the foul city of Stench. Upon the plains, in an act that seemed to defy the very Gods, these Men built the Tower of Stone and other great monuments which seem to defy time.

Of their power we know little. We do, however, know that they learned the arts of Magick - enough that they could break the usual rules of living - and that they had a great reverence for the dead. Perhaps their culture gave rise to the Draxian reverence for ancestors, for the Bronze Warriors left grand cartouches in memory of their heroes.

Age Of The Draxian Alliance

The Drax remember an age before the coming of the Fey. Lost in the mists of time, perhaps countless millenia ago, there were seven Great Houses of the Draxian Alliance. Each built its own citadel upon the world, a bastion against the weather and a home for the hearty souls within. In these times, it must be remembered, the world was less stable and far more wild: storms would lash the mountains which, in turn, spewed forth their magma and smoke; the realms were ever-shifting and hard to tame.

The Great Houses learned to live beneath the earth because it was safer than living on the surface. Although not averse to the short summer seasons, the Drax never allowed themselves to be lulled by the temperate times. Stormwinters and Firetimes were always imminent. Still, through this age of struggle and hard labour, the original citadels were built and maintained. The fruits of the earth, such as iron and copper, were mined and their secrets unlocked. It was a period of growth and grandeur for the Drax. It ended with the opening of the first Nexus.

Age Of The Grim Fey

None can be sure of the origins of the Fey, save to say that they are alien to the realm of Tikhon. By means of legendary Nexus Portals these fell overlords came to our world. Through their dark and arcane magicks, some of which have passed into our own knowledge over the passage of time, the grim Fey came to dominate all the species.

For countless years, and through a brutal and yet consistent rule, the Fey ruled. They worked the lands and enslaved the peoples to do their bidding. It is said that they brought servants from their own realm to ours and, some whisper, they bred new species to populate and tame the wilds. None can be sure, but some sages believe that the Nyhi are one such species, bred on foreign soil and imported into our own world for fell purpose. Surely the same suspicions must fall on other races too.

Not all was calm and ordered under the rule of the Fey, however: violent forces were gathering to resist them. An alliance of Men and Drax was one such conspiracy which, in the fullness of time, came to grow and stand against them. Constant raids from the Goblins and Orcs also took their toll. Over time, it is said, those enslaved came to realise that the Fey were not great in number. The mighty draconic soldiers of the Fey, the Cherobek Drakona, were found to be vulnerable to sword

and axe; eventually, as the rebellion grew and the Fey withdrew from territory that was in dispute, the soldiers too were marshalled in defense of their realms rather than as conquerors.

Age Of Empire

Most recent of all, the 1000 or more years which saw the rise and reign of the Emperors of Tikhon stand most clear in the memory of us all. It seems strange to consider, but we have more records and artefacts from this illustrious period than for any of the other three combined.

The Empire was born far to the south of Faulstieff, across the waters that lie beyond the coast of Moonshae and further even than the waters south of Great Kesh. Travellers of our own era, those brave enough to circumnavigate the blasted and roiling remains of the Manascape, tell of another continent from which the origins of the Empire arose.

This reign of Men was born from the previous Age of the Fey. What we remember is that, as the Mannish tribes bound together under one leader, they found the strength to resist the evil magicks of the Fey and throw off the shackles of slavery. Over many years, the Empire grew and expanded. Eventually those brave soldiers of the Emperor, carried by great ships across the Boundless Ocean, arrived upon the shores of Northern Tikhon. In time, the Empire overthrew the Fey and drove them forever from our realm.

Age of Barons

Now is the time of the Barons. You, my illustrious Lord, sit as a fine example of the greatest of those who have taken upon themselves the burden of re-uniting the disparate peoples of Tikhon under benevolent rule.

What can be said, given so short a time of peace as these past 400 years? In that time, against all the odds, the Barons have carved for themselves a series of kingdoms. These kingdoms, each most often termed as a “Barony”, have kept the peace and held at bay the fell creatures of Chaos. We look ahead to a time of prosperity, as trade and the movement of knowledge begins once more upon the face of the land.

Races of Northern Tikhon

This chapter gives an overview of the Races as they appear in the northern realms of Tikhon, along with a few notes to help you play each one.

The Races available to players are a collection considered suitable for heroic play. In theory, any of the species in the world could be a player character... but most DMs prefer you to choose from the Races best suited to heroism.

The Common Races

These races are those most often encountered in the realms of Tikhon.

Drax

The Drax have been around longer than Humans can remember. Because they are shorter than Humans, they are commonly known as “Dwarfs”. Drax are tough, resilient and often dour; many Humans stereotype them as grumpy and miserable, but this is a mistake which overlooks the Drax capacity for celebration.

Physically, Drax are shorter than Humans but also stout and tough. A Drax can usually work harder and longer, preferring to get stuck in rather than pussy-foot around. Well-adapted to high-altitudes, Drax have nevertheless often chosen to live underground in mining communities. As a consequence, Mountain Drax have become adapted to seeing in the darkness of underground places.

Drax have wrestled with Orcs, Uruk, Goblins and Giants throughout most of their history, a fact which has scarred relations with these brutal species. Mountain Drax harbor resentment and even hatred towards these tribal enemies, having long practiced the art of war against their raids and depredations.

The Drax love for shiny things is another fact that cannot be overlooked. Gold, gems and other precious things are desired greatly by most; it's a fact that the average Drax would not be able to walk past a pile of Gold Sovereigns without pocketing at least a few of them. He might not even notice that he has done so.

Nyhi

Even the Nyhi themselves are not entirely sure of their origins, except to say that they are ancient. Ancient Nyhi sages claim that they were refugees from another world which had become beholden to an ancient Evil. Whatever the truth, the Nyhi are divided into several cabals, each culturally distinct and more than a little competitive.

Nyhi tend to be tall and lithe, with long legs and fine features. The up-swept ears, the trait that most folk associate with them, are distinctive of all the Nyhi breeds. They are notoriously far-sighted and agile, but also fragile and more easily injured than some other species.

The haughty attitude of Nyhi comes from their long lives, being capable of life-spans of more than 10,000 years unless they are killed in battle. With such a long view, Nyhi tend to see the petty interests of Humans as short-term and reveal their disdain for even the long-term plans of the other races.

The Nyhi love for art and nature, especially prevalent among the nature-loving Forest Folk, is legendary. Craftsmanship is regarded highly by Nyhi; even the lowliest of forged daggers is likely to be named and treated with deep reverence.

Sha-Nyhi

Nyhi and Humans have lived together ever since the first Men built their villages and traded with the enigmatic elder races. What was unusual was the ability of the two species to interbreed, a fact which has never quite sat well with either side. Sha-Nyhi are the result of Human and Nyhi matings, giving rise to an elegant and beautiful form which blends the strengths of both.

Nyhi tend to regard their half-cousins as something lesser, whilst Humans tend to regard Sha-Nyhi as suspicious oddities. It is usual for “Half-Elves” to be raised by Humans, but this is not always the case. Thus, each hero of Sha-Nyhi blood can be distinctively raised and display very different heritage.

Physically, Sha-Nyhi are likely to have the ears of their Nyhi parent whilst retaining the heavier frame of their Human heritage. Overall, they are hardy and creative types with a deep respect for nature. Their outcast reputation will lead many to follow the path of adventurer.

Goblins

Small, sneaky and often hairy, Goblins are seen by many other species as the rodents of the sentient races. They are, however, quite intelligent and nimble creatures who live in tribal groups based around the strongest male leader.

Goblins are one of the elder races, having been around at least as long as the Nyhi and Drax. They have a long-term enmity with both races, dating back over a long history of raids and wars.

Tending to be braver in groups, Goblins rarely go anywhere alone. Some of the smarter ones can learn magick, and many others choose to serve one of the deities. Goblin adventurers are rare indeed – they are often the unusual and outcast weirdos who prefer the company of “the Biggies” over the comfort of the tribal cave or camp.

Hobbytts

Hobbytts are short, lithe and generally energetic folk who enjoy good food and merry celebrations. Many are easily mistaken for Human children and, as a consequence, can be a little touchy about

their height when teased by “the Big Folk”. One favourite nickname is “Halfling”, which most Hobbytts would find offensive.

Hobbytts have lived among Humans for centuries, having first been traders who brought many curiosities and wonders to the towns and cities of the Old Empire. This long history gives Hobbytts a generally good reputation as trustworthy and friendly.

Physically, Hobbytts are more than simply shorter; they are hardy folk with a good stomach and a stout heart, capable of great feats when called upon. They have large, hairy feet which they absolutely refuse to cover with shoes and a tendency to grow their hair long.

Hobgoblins

Hobgoblins are not (as commonly believed) related to Hobs and Goblins. The name derives from the cruel behaviour associated with the Red-cap Hob and the raiding nature of Goblins. Hobgoblins are, actually, a sub-species of Orc.

Generally living in raiding “gangs”, Hobgoblins are roughly man-sized and very hairy. They are adapted to forests and are more comfortable in daylight than are their cousins, the Orcs. Hobgoblins have pronounced lower jaw canines and deep, heavyset brows. They are smart and agile, preferring to ambush unwary travellers.

Socially, Hobgoblins are mistrusted by almost everyone in “civilised” culture. They make for good Rogues, however, and many have also found work in larger towns as enforcers. Gregarious and boisterous, this is a race that can make for good company once others overcome prejudice.

Humans

Humans are the dominant species upon the face of Tikhon, if not the most numerous. Their position arises from their flexibility and willingness to survive in just about any climate or circumstance in which there is profit to do so.

Humans average around five to six feet in height and are physically diverse, from the black-skinned Mantobyrns of the far southern plains to the pale-skinned Eskysi of the arctic tundras. They are hardy, brave and generally amenable to learning from their many mistakes.

The other races tend to either like or loathe Humans. Nyhi and Drax tolerate them, viewing them as brash and wild; Hobbytts tend to enjoy Human company because of their positive and outgoing traits; Orcs and other more feral species tend to fear them.

It’s not too hard to play a Human hero, so if you are new to roleplaying this race makes a really good choice. Not only are you experienced as a Human already, they have a broad set of abilities that makes surviving the harsh world a little more bearable.

Orcs

Legend says that the Orcs are a breed of Nyhi who became corrupted by Chaos, leaving their high civilisation behind and taking to the wild. Neither the Orcs nor the Nyhi would pay heed to such rumours.

Orcs are tough, brash and aggressive. They stand at least as tall as a Human, and often taller, and they are of tougher stuff than any Nyhi. Orcs don't much like sunlight, although they are not (as some old wives tell it) afraid of it or harmed by it. They simply prefer the shadows of night more than the brightness of the day, often choosing to live in forests or caves.

Tribal in nature, Orcs gather in bands and are usually ruled by strength. Some groups retain the traditions of having a Matriarch who chooses a strong mate, whilst other groups are simply ruled by the toughest Orc around.

Although brutal and hulking, Orcs are not necessarily lacking in wits. They can be very cunning hunters, and some will take well to the arts of magick. Humans tend to look down on Orcs as little more than animals, but this is often a mistake – many times in history an Orcish tribe has arisen and sorely tested the strength of Mannish civilisation.

The Uncommon Races

Within the Human-dominated realms of Tikhon, these races are less common or fewer in number.

Bruxx

Bruxx are a species of “rat-men”, taller than the Drax but shorter than a Human. They have a rat-shaped head, walk upright (usually) using their very long tails to balance. Highly sensitive to scent and sound, Bruxx have poor distance vision but a good sense of touch.

Although distasteful to some Humans (and often to Nyhi), Bruxx are a clean, well-ordered society with a clear hierarchy based on fitness and wits – the quickest brain and the strongest stomach. They are not (contrary to popular belief) evil creatures by nature.

Many Bruxx have been captured and enslaved by Humans over the years, leading to some distinct nervousness when visiting some of the larger settlements; rural relations, however, tend to be amicable.

Bruxx are quick-witted and agile, yet physically less strong than Humans. You can play them as furtive and quick-tongued, or as cautious and deliberate with equal ease. Think rats and you're on to a winning strategy.

Centaur

Centaur are a proud and noble race, but with a tendency to over-react at the slightest slur. With a horse body, and the torso of a large man, they are a large creature to stumble across on a dark night.

Living in ancient woods, Centaur are friends to Nyhi and other woodland creatures. They live in clans, moving from campsite to campsite, following the game and the seasons. It is unusual for a Centaur to leave their clan and go wandering, but sometimes a noble quest draws an honourable response from an individual.

Centaur live longer lives than most Humans, but nowhere near as lengthy as a Nyhi. This gives most Centaur an air of wisdom and a steady calmness, as they take their time to make decisions.

Hobs

The Hob is a race despised and feared by many Humans in Northern Tikhon. Legends tell of Hobs with childlike faces, long white hair and beards who, when mistaken for jolly and friendly souls, eventually reveal their true nature as bitter and twisted thieves. One famous Hob, called Nicklaus, is renowned for shinning down chimneys and stealing the birthday presents of children.

In reality, Hobs are cave dwellers. They are generally interested in rich mining resources, and consequently sometimes join up with Drax. Many are as selfish and evil as the legends say, but most are (like other races) getting on with their lives as best as they can.

The real source of the legends is the bizarre “Red Cap” cult. These Evil servants of the Winter King love stealing children, drowning cats, and pushing over old ladies. Once prevalent in Northern Tikhon, this malignant group was all but exterminated by the Lightbringers at the time of the Old Empire. Some remain to keep the myths alive.

Nisse

With a tiny elfin figure and large dragonfly-like wings, the Nisse flit about at high speed, never really settling, always looking for the next adventure. Living in the woods, they love to find a larger humanoid and follow them around, trying to help but often ending up causing mischief.

Town-dwellers are not really aware of Nisse, but rural folk regard them with generally good humour. Forest Folk and Centaurs have fairly good relations with the Nisse colonies that inhabit their woodland realms. As it's unusual for Nisse to live in mountainous regions, Mountain Drax and Goblins are largely ignorant of their existence.

Nisse can be played as innocent and giggly, or as sulky and impish, or somewhere in-between. Few have much patience for religion or magick, despite their obviously magickal roots, but there are exceptions. The most common adventuring role for Nisse would be as Rogues; some, however, can make quite skilled Warriors and Rangers.

Uruk

Uruk are the tougher, meaner, bigger cousins of Orcs. Tradition states that Uruk were magickally forged by an ancient Mage who wanted to create a superior form of warrior. Whether or not this is true, Orcs fear Uruk and will often serve them willingly.

Powerfully built, the Uruk is a monstrous hulk of flesh and bone. Thankfully rare, the race is feared by most other species because of their tendency towards aggression. The Uruk are generally matriarchal in organisation but they are rarely numerous. A mating couple may take refuge within an Orc or Goblin tribe, offering their strength in return for protection and food.