



CHAPTER 1: THE BOOK OF LORE

In the year of the Burning Phoenix, the twenty-fourth year of reign of his majesty Emperor Domistan — tenth of his line, Ruler of the Iron Empire, Lord of the Dread Sea, Guardian of the North, Heir of the Eastern and the Western Empire —, I, Velastios of Syranthia, write this chronicle, so that all my knowledge, gathered throughout a lifetime at the humble service of the Library, will not disappear when Hulian, Smith of Words, finally calls me to his side in the skies...

The world described in this setting is called the Dread Sea Dominions, by the name of the massive body of water at its center, where the most important modern civilization, the Iron Empire, has flourished and now is slowly, but unstopably, decaying under the pressure of its own size and of the barbarians pushing on its borders.

This is an age in which a brave warrior and his sword can carve his name in history.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WORLD

THE DREAD STAR

Almost two thousand and five hundred years ago, where the Dread Sea stands



*L. Woodruffe
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now, there was a great plain where a magnificent civilization flourished - the Keronian Empire. They were a noble race of magicians, astrologers, and priests, and under their domination the world knew marvels that today are almost impossible to imagine. Despite their powers, they were not fair minded people, and some scholars say they were not even humans.

The strength of the Keronians came from their slaves — thousands of dark-skinned men who constructed their marble and alabaster cities, raised their observatory temples, and died on the altars of their ancient gods.

In that age, the primitive white men lived in caverns in the north, and took great care not to come near the borders of the Keronian Empire, because the Keronian gods were always thirsting for blood, no matter what the race of the sacrificial victims was.

But one day, in a single moment, the Keronian Empire ended. A massive mountain

of fire falling from the skies hit the very center of the empire, destroying it and leaving an enormous crater, soon filled with the waters of the Endless Ocean.

The stories call the falling mountain the Dread Star, and the newly created body of water took the name of the Dread Sea, because, even today, its waters are of an intense red color.

The philosophers and sages debate about why the Keronians, mages, and astrologers failed to foresee the destruction that was upon them and they did not leave the empire in time. Someone says they foresaw the cataclysm, but only too late; others say that the Dread Star was a punishment sent by the gods for the many evils committed by this cruel race.

The impact of the Dread Star raised a massive cloud of dust. For many years, the light of the sun was dimmed all over the continent and most of the few survivors died of famine, pestilence, and even worse afflictions.



Then strong winds took the red dust south over the northern part of what today are the Lush Jungles. The trees died, their trunks calcified, and the whole area became the so-called Red Desert. Further south the situation was better, but the jungle was forced to recede becoming the Ivory Savannah that still exist today.

Climate changes were not the only effects of the Dread Star. The thin dust filling the air transformed the world in many strange ways. Beasts of all types started to appear, such as white and black-striped horses in the Ivory Savannah, and massive flying snakes known as Lhoban Dragons, in the south east, among the highest cliffs of the continent.

Mutations caused by the fallen star did not spare the humans either. Many of them started to become brutish, feral beings, and the most unfortunate, the primitive people from the mountains of the north-east now turned into the hulking beasts known as Trolls.

With the passing of time, these abominations became rarer, but they never entirely disappeared. In remote, unpopulated areas, the monsters dwelling in the old Keronian ruins still howl at the moon today...

HERO'S JOURNAL: THE LOTUS

One of the most mysterious changes after the fall of the Dread Star was the diffusion of the Lotus. It is a strange plant with flowers of intense colors: red, white, purple and many other. The Lotus appeared all over the continent in several different forms. In the Caledlands the Green Lotus grows, like mistletoe, on the branches of ancient oaks. In the Ivory Savannah, flowers of Gray Lotus blossom from the top of tall weeds. In the Brown Sea, the Purple Lotus closely resembles water lily. Whatever its form is, the Lotus has great magical powers, but it is also very dangerous. If eaten fresh,

it is toxic and might lead to death but, if processed and mixed with other ingredients, it can create fantastic essences, poisons, and so on. Each type of Lotus has a different effect depending on the color of the plant and the ingredients it is mixed with. Lotus masters are an exclusive sect of alchemists specializing in the study of this remarkable plant. Their recipes are handed down from a master to a disciple in the utmost secrecy and Lotus masters are ready to kill to learn the recipe of a rival sect member. The greatest Lotus masters are the Alchemists of the Free City of Gis.

THE DAWN OF CIVILIZATION

The centuries passed and the climate slowly stabilized. The Dread Sea, for some unknown reason, is quite warm, and this made the surrounding areas temperate and comfortable. No longer fearing the Keronians, the white men of the north started migrating south, to the warmer regions. Some of them abandoned their primitive way of life and discovered agriculture. The first small villages appeared all around the fertile shores of the Dread Sea.

Another migration happened in that remote era. The olive-skinned slaves of the Keronians, who had survived the cataclysm because they lived on the outskirts of the empire, took to the road. They were following a primeval urge to go as far as possible from the land of their masters. Some of them reached the vast woodlands of the north-east peninsula of the Dominions and became known as the Caleds, while the southern ones, of a smaller stature, reached the Lush Jungles and became the progenitors of the present-day Pygmies.

Despite their different appearance and the enormous distance between them, the

two olive-skinned races still share many common features. They are both primitive, very reclusive and isolationists, and always live in the forests, perhaps because the constant sight of the sky reminds them of the day when the Dread Star fell onto the world.

But let us return to the fertile shores of the Dread Sea, the cradle of civilization. In the space of a thousand years, the small villages became cities which soon expanded their boundaries and became small, autocratic city states. Their numbers were growing and, in a few centuries, they started to compete for more fertile areas. Many small-scale wars were being fought in those days, but no city was strong enough to conquer the others permanently.

Then Fabron, a priest-smith from the small town of Faberterra, the follower of a minor deity named Hulian, discovered a way to melt the strange stones of the Gray River.

Thus, iron was discovered.

THE IRON EMPIRE

The dwellers of Faberterra were farmers who used to work together plowing large fields. The working crews provided the basis for the Iron Empire's war machine: the phalanx. The Iron Priests of Hulian were the first generals of the armies; they led their troops in Hulian's name, but they swore loyalty to a Council of wise citizens.

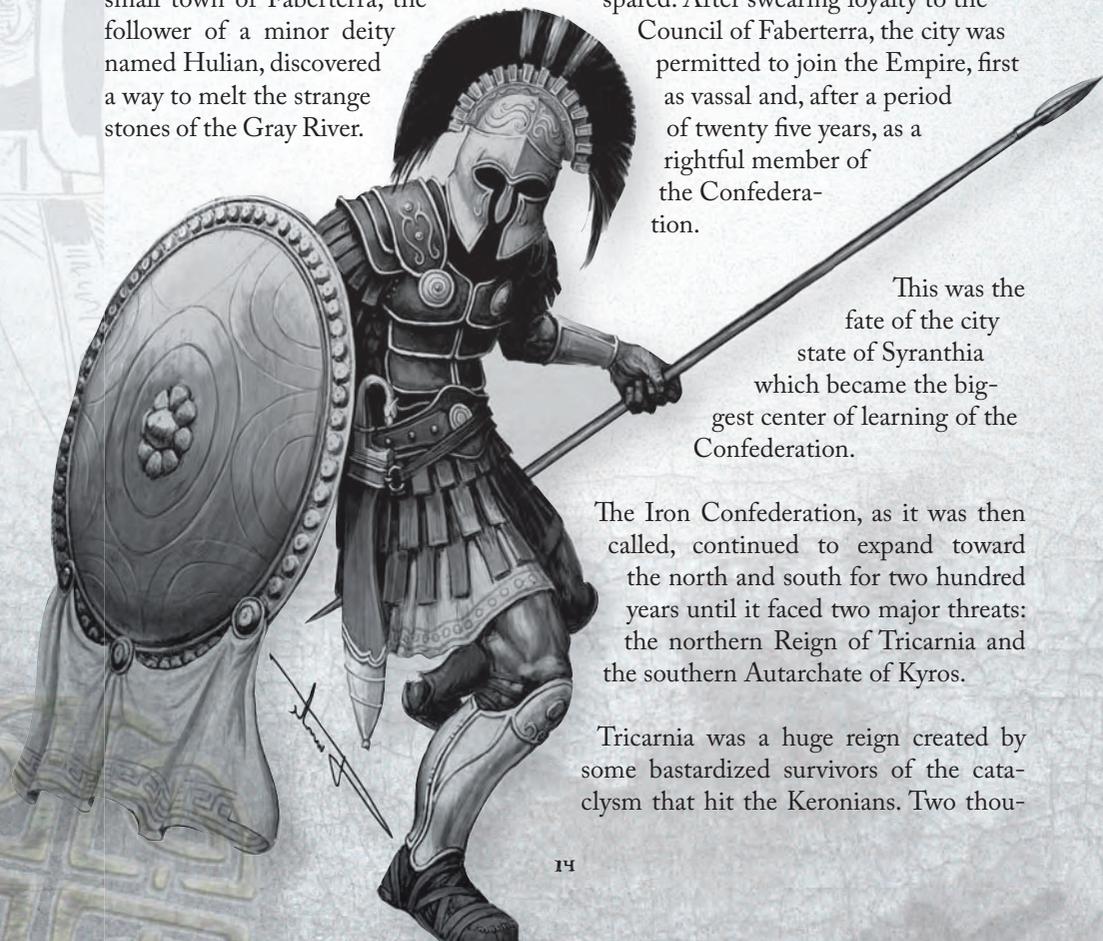
Thanks to their iron weapons and armor, Hulian's followers conquered all their immediate neighbors. In a few generations Faberterra became a large state along the eastern coast of the Dread Sea. Yet, these men were conquerors, not pillagers: any city surrendering to their might was spared. After swearing loyalty to the

Council of Faberterra, the city was permitted to join the Empire, first as vassal and, after a period of twenty five years, as a rightful member of the Confederation.

This was the fate of the city state of Syranthia which became the biggest center of learning of the Confederation.

The Iron Confederation, as it was then called, continued to expand toward the north and south for two hundred years until it faced two major threats: the northern Reign of Tricarnia and the southern Autarchate of Kyros.

Tricarnia was a huge reign created by some bastardized survivors of the cataclysm that hit the Keronians. Two thou-



sand years of breeding with lesser races made them more humanlike in appearance, but they maintained the ancient Keronian way of life. Tricarnia's massive estates, cultivated by slaves, were governed by small hierarchies of corrupt Priest Princes, worshippers of ancient Keronian gods and powerful sorcerers.

Slaves also formed the bulk of the Tricarnian army. Although they did not know how to use iron, the sheer numbers of their slave soldiers, combined with the arcane knowledge of the Priest Princes, were enough to stop the advances of the Iron Empire toward the north. Many battles were fought, but the dark magic of the Tricarnian sorcerers awoke creatures not seen in the world for eons, and pestilence and misfortune tormented the invaders.

In the end, the mighty Iron Phalanxes of Faberterra were forced to withdraw.

It was not just a political and military defeat, but also a spiritual one. The Tricarnians went into battle with the standard of their main Goddess, Hordan, Lady of Darkness, and they took no prisoners because they sacrificed them all on the altars of their evil deity. In the end, the lost war shook the faith of the Confederation: Hulian was accused of being a false god, the Iron Priests were lynched and, in the end, the popularity of the cult faded.

In the south the situation was not any better.

The Autarchate of Kyros was a big state with access to two seas, the Dread Sea and the Brown Sea. It was ruled by an absolute monarchy and it managed to stop the expansion of the Iron Confederacy.

Kyros had a tradition of war against the black people of the Ivory Savannah. It

was a constant struggle between two opposite ways of living: the nomadic herders of the Ivory Savannah Tribes against the farming communities of Kyros. Through contacts with the Savannah people, Kyros acquired a powerful weapon, the bane of the Iron Confederacy: elephants. They were the only beasts in the world capable of standing against the Buffalo Riders of the Savannah.

The Iron Phalanxes of the Confederacy fled in front of the mighty charge of the armored pachyderms, and, after a couple of disastrous battles, the generals of Faberterra were again forced to retreat.

Meanwhile, a minor but quite important event happened: the insular city of Ascaia, an early conquest of the Confederation, revolted against the local governor. It would be viewed as one of the strangest rebellions in the history of the Confederation. This rebellion was motivated, not by politics, but by the gender of those doing the rebelling. The women of the city, tired of being oppressed by their men, took to

