

## ABOUT THIS BOOK

Welcome to *Beasts & Barbarians*, Gravel's setting of sword and sorcery! In this book, the **Player Guide**, you'll find all you need to create powerful barbarians, courageous amazons, cunning rogues, or mysterious warlocks and venture across the Dread Sea Dominions!

## FIVE YEARS LATER...

When I designed *Beasts & Barbarians* I intended from the beginning that the setting should be alive and kicking, like a screaming barbarian in battle.

Five years have passed since the previous edition of the game, the Golden Edition, and many adventures have happened during this time, both in official published scenarios and in the awesome adventures played at your tables.

When we decided to publish a new edition, extending the timeline was only natural.

So the question is, what has happened in the Dominions in the last five years?

A lot of things, my friends, a lot of things, good and bad in equal part, and ripe for adventure, of course.

Are you sure you want to discover them?

If the answer is yes, well, grab your sword and turn the page!

## A NOTE ON ABBREVIATIONS

To save space, several abbreviations are used in this book to refer to other books of the *Beasts & Barbarians* Steel Edition line:

SEPG = Steel Edition Player Guide

(H) = Henchman

SEGM = Steel Edition Game Master Guide

(RH) = Right Hand

(E) = Extra

(WC) = Wild Card

*Shangor looks suspiciously at the dark jungle in front of him. Born in the forests of the savage north, he is usually at ease in the woods, but there is something strange amongst these unfamiliar, vine-covered trees. His nose is full of the ripe smell of corruption—and of ancient evil. His skin crawls, as if unseen eyes were watching him. His hand instinctively caresses the hilt of his axe. The contact with the wood, polished by use, gives the massive barbarian comfort.*

*He crouches down to examine the tracks in the mud. Five men, at least, went this way, carrying Korala, the daughter of the caravan master, whom they took several hours ago.*

*The prints of bare feet are noticeably smaller than those of a full-grown man.*

*"Pygmies!" Shangor curses, thinking of the stories he has heard about these vicious, elusive savages. Tales of silent blowpipes loaded with poison darts, promising a painful death, and of kidnapped maidens, sacrificed to bestial gods. Yet, Korala's beauty — and her father's gold — drive his worries away.*

*As he follows the tracks, he soon becomes aware of a low, thudding noise — sacrificial drums, and not far away. His sharp ears lead him unerringly towards them, until he finds himself in front of a strange, forbidding ruin of huge size.*

*His hesitation gone, Shangor immediately readies his axe, smiling grimly. As always, thought and action are one and the same in his barbaric, uncivilized mind.*

*The light of the moon shines on his massive muscles as, clad only in a loincloth, he sneaks through the dark jungle, as silent as a leopard..*

# THE DIARY OF JUSTINUS OF SYRANTHIA

MY BELOVED MASTER VELASTIOS, IT IS WITH UTMOST  
RESPECT THAT I WRITE YOU THIS LETTER. SIX LONG  
YEARS HAVE PASSED SINCE I LEFT OUR BELOVED LIBRARY  
IN SYRANTHIA TO WANDER THE DOMINIONS, BECAUSE,  
AS YOU USED TO SAY, THE PLACE OF A SAGE IS IN THE  
WORLD, ALWAYS OBSERVING IT WITH EYES EVER FRESH AND  
CURIOUS, AND RECORDING, WITH WORDS AND PAINTINGS,  
THE MANY MARVELS, BEAUTIFUL AND HORRIBLE ALIKE, OF  
OUR LANDS.

OVER THESE LONG YEARS I HAVE TAKEN A NUMBER OF  
NOTES, WHICH I SEND YOU NOW; I PRAY YOU WILL  
REGISTER THEM IN THE ANNALS OF THE LIBRARY, FOR THE  
INSTRUCTION OF FUTURE GENERATIONS...

FROM THE DIARY OF JUSTINUS OF SYRANTHIA



# FROM THE DREAD STAR TO THE FALL OF THE IRON EMPIRE

**A**s my old master Velastios always told me, to understand the people of a land, you must know her history, so that's where I'll start my narration. I'll try to be concise, but if I talk too much, please stop me. The earliest records of the Great Library of Syranthia say that the lands today known as the Dominions, in times of yore, were a large empire, belonging to an ancient, inhuman race: the Keronians.

Powerful sorcerers and demon worshippers, they controlled all the known lands, due to their powers and their legions of slaves.

The Keronian empire of terror ended, around five thousand years ago, due to a terrible cataclysm, the Fall of the Dread Star, which destroyed the very center of the empire, creating a large body of water, the Dread Sea, and altering forever the geography and history of the Dominions.

Nobody knows the true nature of the Dread Star; the Priests of Hulian say it was a sign of the wrath of the gods, but if you wander the Dominions as much as I have, you'll hear the wildest stories on this subject.

Whatever the cause of the Fall, the Dread Sea is still warm in its heart today, as if the Dread Star might still be burning somewhere in its depths.

## INTRODUCTION

The Fall dramatically altered the climate: the dust raised by the cataclysm altered the land, destroying forests, creating new deserts and causing the deaths of countless innocent people.

Slowly, the climate returned to normal, and a host of city states were born around the Dread Sea, which are collectively called “the Dominions”.

The most important of them was Faberterra, a city of humble farmers, not very different from the others, apart from a single fact, which changed the history of the world.

In 1224 AF, Fabron, a Faberterran priest of the minor god Hulian, discovered that the gray stones on the bed of the river near Faberterra could be melted and forged into a very strong metal: iron.

From that moment on, Faberterra’s raise was unstoppable. The mighty Iron Phalanxes, supported by the Smith Priests of Hulian, conquered all the surrounding lands.

In the south it annexed Syranthia, where the Great Library has stood for innumerable ages, and Kyros, land of elephants, while in the north it conquered Tricarnia, home of the decadent Priest Princes, heirs of Keron, worshippers of the demon queen Hordan, hated enemy of Hulian.

After the conquest of Tricarnia, Faberterra was no longer simply Faberterra the city state, it was the Iron Empire, ruled by Domestan I, Masterarkos of all the Phalanxes and first Emperor of Faberterra.

Not everybody was subjugated by the might of the Iron Phalanxes: in the north, the fierce Northlanders, the fearful Cairnlanders, who dwell in the tombs of their Ancestors, and the mysterious Picts, dwelling in an ancient, untouched forest, resisted the Iron Empire’s rapacious appetite, while in the south the black-skinned tribes of the Ivory Savannah, who are luckily beyond the Empire’s reach, continued to live their savage lives in freedom.

Another noticeable exception was the Island of Ascaia, where the women rebelled against the cruel governor and declared independence, becoming the fierce Amazons and forbidding their land to any man, a law which still exists today.

But the Empire was tainted from its birth: the peace treaty with Tricarnia included the marriage between Domestan and Salkaria, a Tricarnian Princess of legendary beauty, who became the first Empress and who imported the corrupt customs and deities of her people, subtly changing the customs of Faberterra.

The Iron Empire knew a golden age lasting eight centuries, even if the bloodline of the Emperor was slowly tainted by the Tricarnians, who slowly insinuated themselves into the highest ranks of the Empire.

So great was the hunger of the Iron Empire that it expanded eastward, crossing the Iron Mountains and conquering the vastness of Zandor, from Jalizar, the City of Thieves, in the north to the borders of mountainous Lhoban, where the holy monks dwell in their monasteries, in the south.

But the might of man is nothing before a god’s will: in 2450 AF, while the Iron Empire was enjoying a stagnant prosperity, a new, terrible threat, came from the unknown steppes of the east: the Valk, a race of savage, nomadic horsemen, worshippers of demons, invaded the Iron Empire.

Driven by the prophecies of the Valkyria, the warrior-priestesses of their demon god, Sha-Mekri, they were led by Dhaar, the greatest warlord ever known, who came to the west to pillage the Iron Empire and crush it under the hooves of his horse.

The Valk Invasions were terrible: Zandor was totally devastated, and the Cairnlanders and Northlanders of the north, pushed out of their ancestral lands by the Valk, attacked the Iron Empire from the north, looking for shelter in the civilized lands, while the southern provinces, like Kyros, quickly declared independence from Faberterra.

In a few seasons, thousands of years of civilization were wiped away.

It could have been worse, but Dhaar, mired in the long siege of the city of Jalizar, died suddenly, in a mysterious way, in his tent.

The Valk horde shattered, the various clans siding with the three sons of Dhaar, but they remained in Zandor, while the rest of the Iron Empire looked on, agonizing.

This was six years ago, in 2510 AF.

## THE SWORD OF HULIAN

As you know very little of the Dominions, you'll surely be more interested in what has happened in the most recent years.

After the Valk invasion was halted, it looked as if the Iron Empire would recover and civilization would slowly return to the devastated lands of the Dominions, but it hasn't.

It started in 2513 AF, with an omen: a great, red comet appeared in the skies. People all around the Dominions went wild, thinking that another Dread Star was going to fall, destroying the world again.

The priests of the Divine Couple of Faberterra, the double patron deity of the Iron Empire, called it the Sword of Hulian, and said it was a sign of the wrath of the gods, while in Tricarnia the Priest Princes locked themselves in their observatory-temples, studying the old scrolls of Keron, because it seems no prophecy mentioned this strange event.

Whatever the real nature of the Sword of Hulian, it was ripe with consequences for the Dominions.

The very night of its apparition, old King Ekul of Ekul, in southern Zandor, died in his bed, leaving the throne to his niece Yasmine, who, though very young, must now use all her influence to keep the kingdom together, under pressure from the local nobles and the Valk lords who covet the throne.

But this wasn't the weirdest event that happened that night: deep in the mountains of Lhoban, in the monastery of Heaven's Door, the Enlightened One, spiritual guide of all the monks of Lhoban, disappeared without choosing a successor for the first time in history, leaving the mountain kingdom in turmoil.

Briefly after this, the fire of the comet's tail spread over the Ivory Savannah, where the black-skinned tribes, led by the mysterious White King, declared war on mighty Caldeia, the coastal kingdom which predates the savannah by centuries, razing the villages and hunting for slaves.

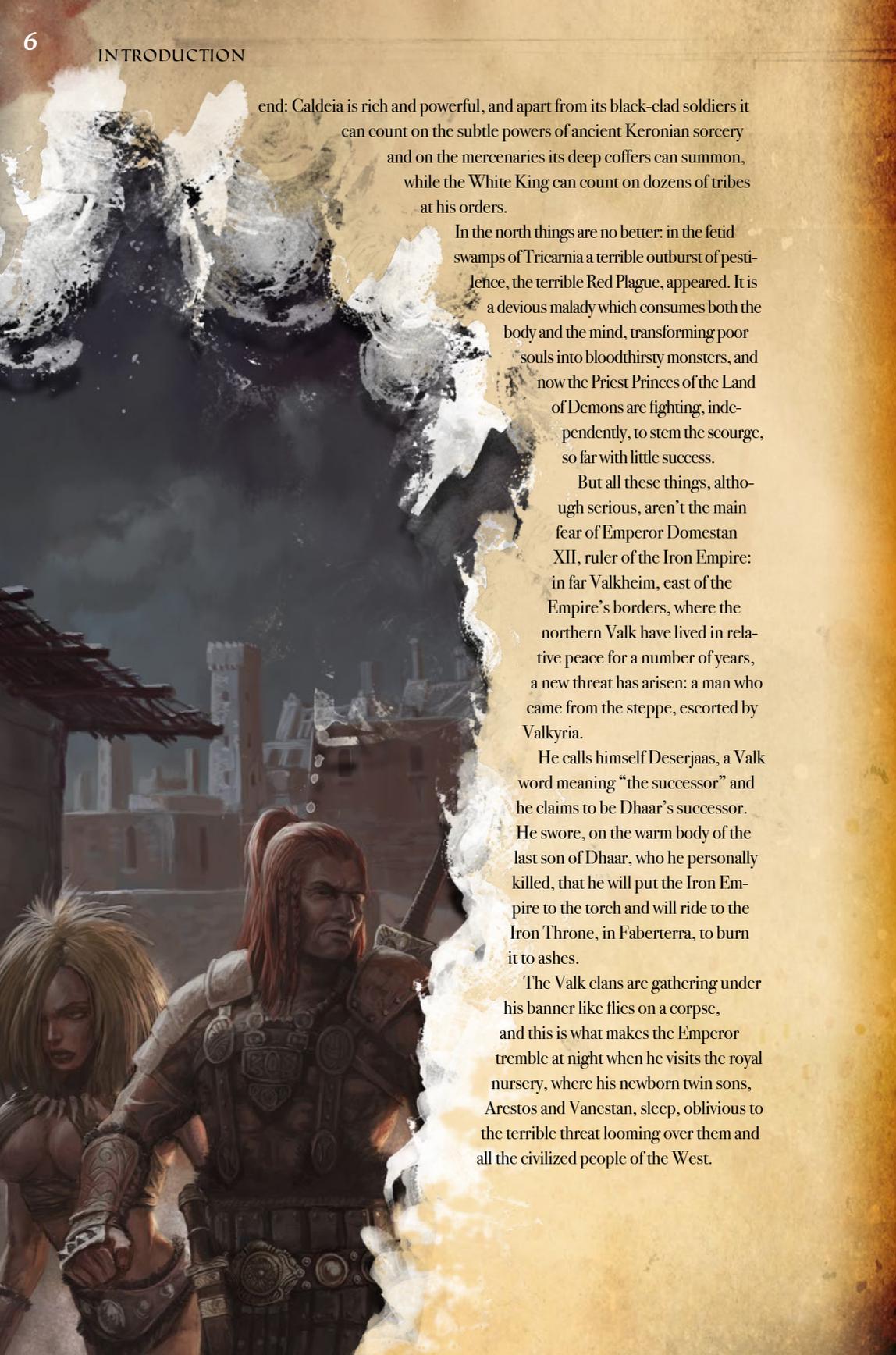
The conflict is called the War of the Chain, and, if ever a just war existed, it is this one, but nobody knows how it will

## A NOTE ON DATES

Every civilization uses a different calendar to date historical events but, for ease of use, the Reformed Salkarian Calendar is adopted in these books. It calculates all dates starting from the presumed year in which the Dread Star fell (AF = After Fall, BF = Before Fall).

If you are interested in a more detailed description of the Dominions' history, you'll find it the *Steel Edition Game Master Guide*.



A dark, atmospheric illustration of a warrior and a woman in a ruined city. The warrior, with long red hair and a stern expression, wears ornate, dark armor with circular motifs. He stands in the foreground, looking towards the right. To his left, a woman with long, light-colored hair is partially visible, wearing a simple, light-colored tunic. The background shows a city in ruins, with smoke rising from the ground and a large, dark, jagged shape resembling a giant hand or a massive structure in the sky. The overall tone is somber and dramatic.

end: Caldeia is rich and powerful, and apart from its black-clad soldiers it can count on the subtle powers of ancient Keronian sorcery and on the mercenaries its deep coffers can summon, while the White King can count on dozens of tribes at his orders.

In the north things are no better: in the fetid swamps of Tricarnia a terrible outburst of pestilence, the terrible Red Plague, appeared. It is a devious malady which consumes both the body and the mind, transforming poor souls into bloodthirsty monsters, and now the Priest Princes of the Land of Demons are fighting, independently, to stem the scourge, so far with little success.

But all these things, although serious, aren't the main fear of Emperor Domestan XII, ruler of the Iron Empire: in far Valkheim, east of the Empire's borders, where the northern Valk have lived in relative peace for a number of years, a new threat has arisen: a man who came from the steppe, escorted by Valkyria.

He calls himself Deserjaas, a Valk word meaning "the successor" and he claims to be Dhaar's successor. He swore, on the warm body of the last son of Dhaar, who he personally killed, that he will put the Iron Empire to the torch and will ride to the Iron Throne, in Faberterra, to burn it to ashes.

The Valk clans are gathering under his banner like flies on a corpse, and this is what makes the Emperor tremble at night when he visits the royal nursery, where his newborn twin sons, Arestos and Vanestan, sleep, oblivious to the terrible threat looming over them and all the civilized people of the West.

## CLIMATE

The Dread Sea Dominions have not been precisely charted (today the science of geometry is practiced only by some scholars of the Great Library of Syranthia), so it is difficult to estimate their actual size, but they certainly have a very wide range of different climates.

The northern kingdoms including the Caledlands, Norheim and the Cairnlands are cold, with winters lasting as long as six months and wide expanses of forests. The Troll Mountains, usually considered the northern boundary of the world, are in the grip of ice for most of the year.

On the other hand, the lands facing the Dread Sea enjoy by far the best climate.

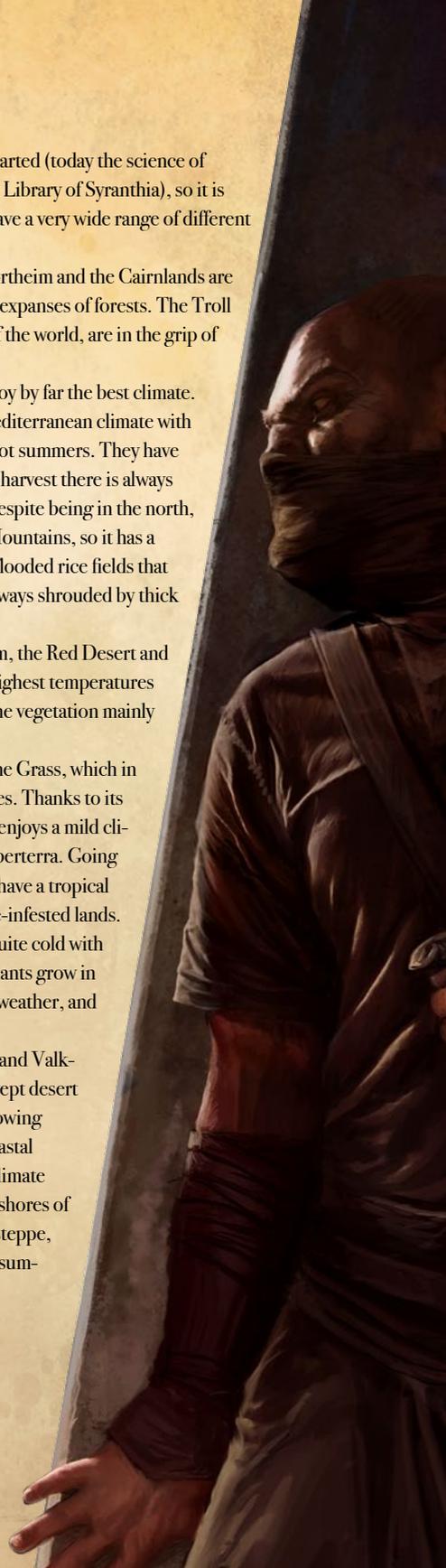
Faberterra, Syranthia and Kyros have a temperate, Mediterranean climate with warm winters, long autumns and springs and generally hot summers. They have plants of all species including olive and fig trees, and the harvest there is always generous. Tricornia differs slightly from its neighbors; despite being in the north, it is protected from the cold winds by the Brokenchain Mountains, so it has a temperate climate but it is quite damp. It has large, half-flooded rice fields that give the nation the aspect of a massive swamp which is always shrouded by thick fog. Going south, the climate gets hotter.

The area called the Horn, comprising the Fallen Realm, the Red Desert and the Ivory Savannah is scorching all year round, and the highest temperatures are reached in the desert. With the exception of oases, the vegetation mainly includes palms, cacti and other resilient plants.

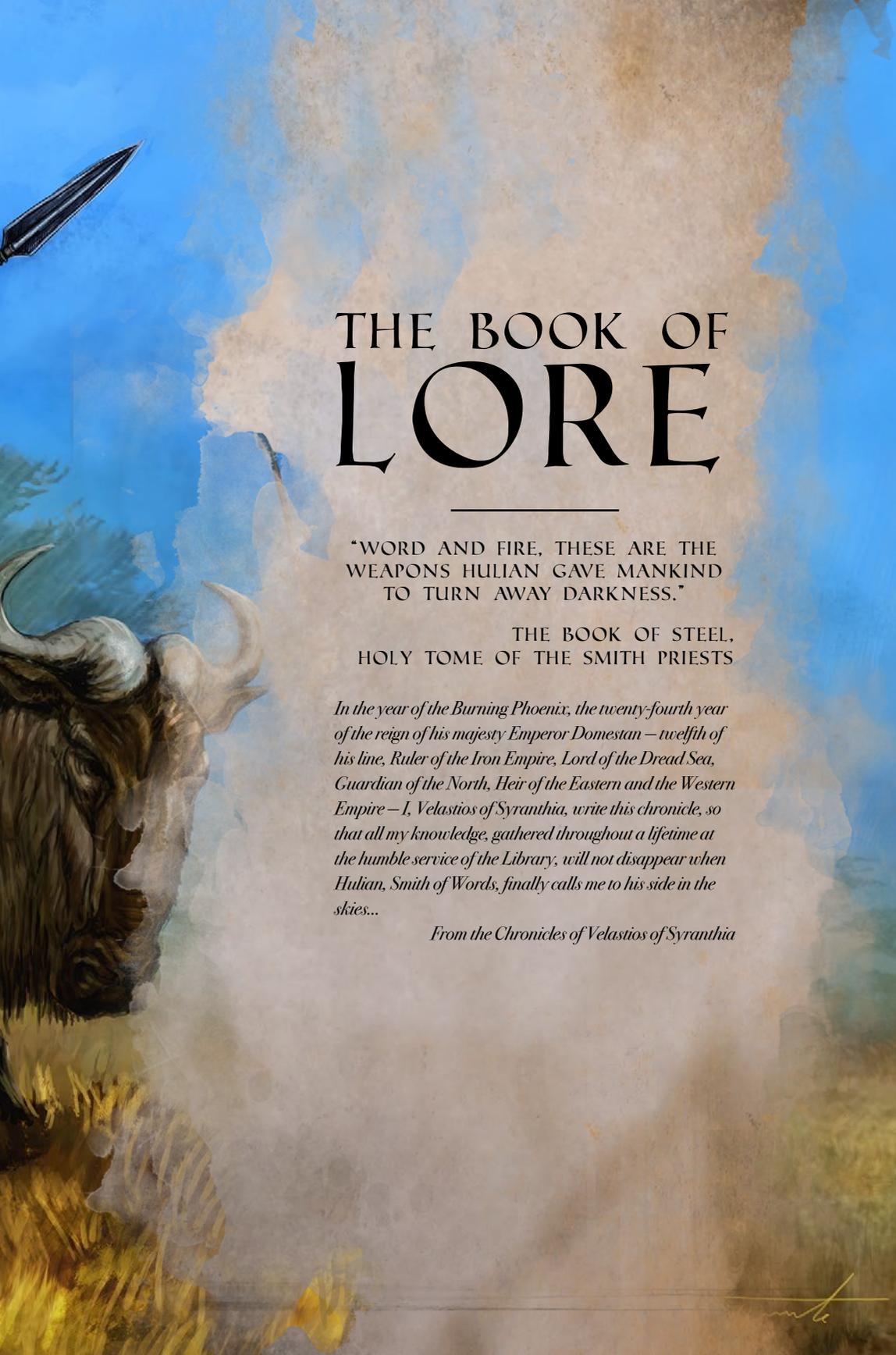
In the Ivory Savannah the main plant is the sturdy Bone Grass, which in the summer takes on a pale color resembling that of bones. Thanks to its position around the mouth of the Buffalo River, Caldeia enjoys a mild climate and its vegetation is similar to that of Kyros and Faberterra. Going further south, the Lush Jungle and the Cannibal Islands have a tropical climate. Plants of every type and size grow in these snake-infested lands. Moving east, Lhoban is an area of high mountains; it is quite cold with short, hot summers. Except for some lichens, very few plants grow in these lands but the valley bottoms are fertile, enjoy mild weather, and yield excellent crops.

The old kingdom of Zandor, comprising Ekul, Jalizar and Valkheim, has the most varied climate. Ekul is a cold, windswept desert with small oases, as there is nothing to stop the winds blowing in from the Valk steppes. The only exceptions are the coastal regions, which are very fertile. Jalizar has a continental climate which gets milder and better for agriculture towards the shores of the Drowned King Sea. Valkheim, actually a part of the steppe, is always exposed to the wind and except for a short, hot summer, it is frozen all year round.

In every land, as well as the common plants, there exist several varieties of Lotus, sometimes useful and sometimes harmful, which take different forms (usually parasitic ones such as White Mistletoe in Norheim) and are used by Lotusmasters in their concoctions.







# THE BOOK OF LORE

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“WORD AND FIRE, THESE ARE THE  
WEAPONS HULIAN GAVE MANKIND  
TO TURN AWAY DARKNESS.”

THE BOOK OF STEEL,  
HOLY TOME OF THE SMITH PRIESTS

*In the year of the Burning Phoenix, the twenty-fourth year of the reign of his majesty Emperor Domestan – twelfth 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...*

*From the Chronicles of Velastios of Syranthia*



If you want to know a land, you must know its history and legends. In the following pages you'll learn the ancient history of the Dread Sea Dominions, as it is known by the Sages of Syranthia, the most learned men of this troublesome era. You will hear stories, legends and wild rumors, reported as faithfully as possible.

As always, what parts of the following report to believe is left to you, wise reader.

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WORLD

## THE DREAD STAR

Almost two thousand five hundred years ago, where the Dread Sea now stands, 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 a fair-minded people, and some scholars say they were not even human.

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 caves 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, quickly 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 why the Keronian mages and astrologers failed to foresee the destruction that was upon them and did not leave the empire in time. Some say they foresaw the cataclysm, but too late; others say that the Dread Star was a punishment sent by the gods for the many evil deeds 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 is the Lush Jungle. 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 exists 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 southeast, among the highest cliffs of the continent.

Mutations caused by the fallen star did not spare humans either. Many of them started to become brutish, feral beings, and the most unfortunate, the primitive people from the mountains of the northeast, 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 others. 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 tops of tall weeds. In the Brown Sea, the Purple Lotus closely resembles the water lily. Whatever its form, 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. Lotusmasters are an exclusive sect of alchemists specializing in the study of this remarkable plant. Their recipes are handed down from master to disciple in the utmost secrecy, and Lotusmasters are ready to kill to learn the recipes of a rival. The greatest Lotusmasters 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 warmer regions. Some of them abandoned their primitive way of life and discovered agriculture.

Thus, 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 northeast peninsula of the Dominions and became known as the Caleds, while the southern ones, of a smaller stature, reached the Lush Jungle 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 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 the more fertile areas. Many small-scale wars were 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.

