



LIFE AND TRADITIONS UNDER THE SUN DOME

by CJ Håkansson and Malin Rydén.

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Sample file

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FOREWORD

Ever since we kicked off the community content program for *RuneQuest* in late 2019, the Jonstown Compendium has continued to surprise and delight. There are now so many wonderful works exploring the length and breadth of Greg Stafford's world of Glorantha, but dearest to my heart were the four wonderful volumes of Jon Webb's *Sandheart* series. These are adventures in set in Sun County, Prax, and *Sun County* of course was my *RuneQuest* supplement, published in 1992 for the third edition of the game. As I noted in the afterword I was asked to write for the final *Sandheart* book, it was immensely gratifying for me to see that, coming up to thirty years since *Sun County* was published, it seems there's still much to be written about, discovered, argued over, and gamed in, in this small and distant, yet special, part of Glorantha.

But when Jonstown Compendium community ambassador and my dear friend Nick Brooke first mentioned to me that there was an all-new 300-page *Sun County* supplement in the works by an entirely different team of independent *RuneQuest* creators, I was truly gobsmacked. 300 pages! I was even more gobsmacked when I got the opportunity to see the manuscript. I am delighted to say that just as *Sandheart* had done, this new work takes the *Sun County* primary source material and expands upon it further – brilliantly enlarging on and exploring facets of Sun Domer society in new, transformative, and original ways. I congratulate the creators of *Life and Traditions Under the Sun Dome*, and encourage RuneQuesters everywhere strap on their hoplite shield, pick up their spear, take a quick, restorative sniff of Hazia, and start exploring the Lands of the Sun.

Υ ◊

Michael O'Brien

author of *Sun County*



INTRODUCTION

Life and Traditions under the Sun Dome is a book about living and dying in Sun County and draws on our collective reflections that have come up during the games of various *RuneQuest* editions that we have run in the area for over three decades as gamemasters. While we, your humble scribes are its midwives and parents, its true origin, its inception if you will, are the questions of our players.

Granted, *RuneQuest: Glorantha* can have as many themes and narrative structures as there are game masters and players, however, when the authors of this book compared our games, we found that they owed a lot to a style of literature called magical realism.

Basically, and forgive us for simplifying an entire literary style in just a few words, it's about the intersection of the mundane humdrum of life with the magical, the unexpected, and the unexplainable. Thus, it makes the magical feel real or natural, and reality seem magical.

But what is reality in Glorantha? It's just like reality is in our world, conflicted. It depends on who you ask, where they live, and how they live. At the heart of *RuneQuest: Glorantha* is the human(ish) experience. Who, why, what, and when are we? It's an experience formed by its surroundings, while the surroundings themselves are, just like in the real world, forever changing.

RuneQuest: Glorantha is a game for over-thinkers. For people that ask questions. And just like its cousin Call of Cthulhu, which is set in other timelines than our own, in societies we can barely comprehend in the age of the smartphone, *RQ:G* is a game with a daunting reputation. It's one of the few fantasy game worlds that mimics the real world's complexity and ambiguity. It has an enormous source material of legends, myths, history, and religions that it describes in overwhelming detail. And yet we have found it's not the detail that is the major problem when trying to explain the setting to a bunch of newcomers. It's not the excessive historical depth that has thrown us, the game masters, for a loop. It's the lack of information about daily life. We can hear your protests already, that we are fighting fire with fire instead of water. Bear with us please.

RQ:G is full of over-the-top characters and events, both tragic and comical. At the same time, it's firmly based on Bronze and early Iron Age life and practices as we understand them today. Actions have consequences, combat is deadly, community is more important than individualism, and heroic actions are often, in the style of Homer, compared to insanity or sociopathic behavior. *RQ:G* walks both paths; the superheroic high adventure and the mundane life journey of not only one character but generations of them.

When the heroes return from their adventures, home, hearth, and family flood back in all their annoying

complexity. Spouses nag that community and legacy are more important than running around and wreaking havoc with friends. Diapers need to be changed, children raised, fields plowed and bills, both profane and divine, must be paid come Sacred Time, in an end-of-the-year reckoning.

The magic-realistic importance of cults, community, passions, runes, and other resources gave our players an intense sensation of immersion. And with that immersion came the questions. Thousands of them. All asked in full earnest as if Glorantha was a real place that we had visited and knew better than they did. We were game masters. How could we not know?

Do I have access to a plow? How is it pulled? Do I know some children's songs to teach my kids, or a lullaby to make them sleep? What do I wear? When is the next festival, what happens during the year, is there something fun to do in the evenings? How do we greet each other? How soundproof is my bedroom? Who are my neighbors, and what food do I serve them when I invite them to a feast? Do we get along? What do I think about the one-percenters if I'm destitute? What's a good insult? Are my life experience and customs as a Farmer exactly the same as those of my Priest friend? When is it acceptable to punch someone? How upset should I be when I get punched?

It can seem silly to bother with all this detail, to try to answer such questions straight-faced instead of brushing them off with a cover-all answer: It's magic, a pretend-game, don't question it. Such responses didn't help our players one bit. They cared so much about their characters and Glorantha that they got a bit miffed at us for being reluctant to answer things that mattered to them. An understandable reaction.

Suppose you took the same kind of game with cults, magic, and monsters but set it in the real world. In that case, realism becomes our world's details, such as being able to buy a soda somewhere, or a cup of coffee. But after one or two sessions, someone is bound to ask the dreaded question that changes everything: "How does my character's family relate to the fact that a monster ate the convenience store last week?"

No matter the setting, a player will want to know two things. What is normal? How do we normally cope with normal? They need this baseline of "normal activity" and "normal response" to develop fun characters that either toe the line or behave differently from the norm.

For us the game masters, the questions our players had were half the fun of putting a game together. They threw us for a loop and gave us new ideas for further adventures and situations. They led to amazing instances of role-playing when players of differing views interacted with each other or the world, some profound, others tragic and some again, so deadpan funny it had us rolling on the floor.

To answer the questions, we set to work. What we didn't know of ancient culture, we researched to the best of



our abilities. We took inspiration from sociological research of how people in our real world navigate the post-modern age's trepidations. When we were dumbstruck, we sat down with our players and tried to answer them together.

This book is the result of all those questions. If you think that some of its answers are weird or over the top, they're not that strange compared to current research about the real-life bronze age, and if you compare them to myths from Europe, Asia, and North America, they're rather understated. Just take a look at the world around you. What do people do to cope with pandemics, wars, bigotry, disasters, hegemonic culture, or failed life expectancies? They do the weirdest but also sanest and, in their own manner, rational things imaginable. So do the people of Glorantha. When a giant steps on your home, a dinosaur walks down the street, or your dead neighbor's daughter that you buried two weeks ago gets resurrected, you sooner or later internalize that life is strange, and you go on with your life.

This book is written to help players create characters grounded in their local society. It is meant to provide inspiration, tips, customs, and depth to a character's life journey in Sun County. It's not meant to be applied to living in Sartar, Teshnos, or Esrolia because it's been written with Sun County realities in mind. As such, the world is presented in a static manner, as a generalized point zero that doesn't change until players are applied. A slice of life as it is seen and lived by the average person.

A player character, by definition, is far from average. The baseline we have suggested here isn't meant to be a line but a trampoline, a tool for the players.

To let their characters *fly*.

WHAT IS THIS BOOK?

It is a book about Sun County. A description of daily life in the fantasy setting of the *RuneQuest: Glorantha* Role-Playing Game. It describes the mundane, frustrating, exhilarating, tragic, funny, pointless, and poignant details of how it is to live in a patriarchal militarized society. The book's main focus is to describe the setting from a social, magical, political, and materialistic point of view, so that a reader can immerse themselves in Sun County's culture. It describes how citizens think, talk, live, and die, but also how and why they laugh or cry, and why they are angry or content. In short, it's a description of what Sun County is; and how its citizens cope with each other as well as with other cultures.

Or as a citizen would put it before kicking you down the stairs: "This is Sun County!"

WHEN IS THIS BOOK?

This book is eternal because Sun County never changes. Unless it has to, in order to stay the same. Due to the volatile nature of Glorantha worldwide events, its primary historical point of reference is from somewhere between 1613 and 1620. However, almost all of its information is valid whether you want to run a campaign set before or after the Great Winter. We've included a potential political outcome of the events that have changed for a campaign set in 1625, and there is very little in this book that is not applicable for a campaign set after this date.

WHY IS THIS BOOK?

It results from a passion for the ordinary person's imaginative way of interpreting reality and a willingness to share ideas and advice with others who would love to role-play in Sun County. This is not a book meant to be memorized or learned by heart, but instead to instill confidence in the reader and a sense of familiarity with the setting. Having read through it, we hope that you will be left with a feeling that you now know how Sun County and its people work.

The book is meant to be used with *RuneQuest: Glorantha* published by Chaosium, but it could just as easily be used with any other game system set in the same setting.

WHO IS THIS BOOK?

It's the brainchild of two writers who together have about six decades' worth of experience in gamemastering Glorantha, *HeroQuest*, and *RuneQuest* in all their various editions. However, it has grown up on its own and now identifies itself by its self-picked title. It considers itself a collection of suggestions for your own campaigns in Sun County, rather than the hard, cold facts its two overbearing, pompous parents might have wanted it to be.

It also believes it's inherently Sun County in manners and customs, so it offers no apology for thinking that all other countries and cultures in Glorantha are unwashed, uncouth barbarians. It's a culturally biased book and should be seen as such.

Despite its nationalistic bent, it would like to point out that it is a firm believer in the general spirit of inclusiveness that reigns in *RQ:G* and would like to think that it considers life from a plethora of different views. As such, it tries to offer a wide and inclusive selection of gender, sexuality, and ethnic options, even though Sun County itself can be very narrow-minded. It firmly supports Maximum Game Fun, and Your Glorantha Will Vary.



SOURCE MATERIAL (Glorantha)

CHAOSIUM

- **RuneQuest: Roleplaying in Glorantha**, Jeff Richard, Greg Stafford, Jason Durall, Steve Perrin & Friends
- **The Guide to Glorantha**, Greg Stafford, Jeff Richard & Friends
- **Sun County: RuneQuest Adventures in the Land of the Sun**, Michael O'Brien & Friends
- **River of Cradles: Lands and Peoples of Pavis and the Zola Fel Valley**, Ken Rolston & Friends

JONSTOWN COMPENDIUM

- **Tales of the Sun County Militia: Sandheart, Vol. 1**, Jonathan Webb
- **New Pavis: City on the Edge of Forever, Pavis & Big Rubble Companion – Director's Cut: Vol. 1**, Ian A. Thomson & Friends
- **Pavis County: Secrets of the Borderlands, Pavis & Big Rubble Companion – Director's Cut: Vol. 3**, Ian A. Thomson & Friends
- **Black Spear**, Nick Brooke & Mike O'Connor
- **The Six Paths**, Edan Jones & Katrin Dirim
- **Nochet: Queen of Cities**, Harald Smith

SOURCE MATERIAL (Real World)

- **The Human Past**, edited by Chris Scarre
- **A War Like No Other**, Victor Davies Hanson
- **Warfare in the Classical World**, John Gibson Warry
- **Zealot**, Reza Aslan

- **Myths from Mesopotamia**, translated by Stephanie Dalley
- **The Great Leveler: Violence and the History of Inequality from the Stone Age to the Twenty-First Century**, Walter Scheidel
- **1177 B.C. The Year Civilization Collapsed**, Eric H. Cline
- **Letters of the Great Kings of the Ancient Near East**, Trevor Bryce
- **Angela Carter's Book of Fairy Tales**, edited by Angela Carter
- **The Dawn of Everything**, David Graeber & David Wengrave
- **Forgotten Peoples of the Ancient World**, Philip Matyszak
- **La vie quotidienne à Rome à l'apogée de l'empire**, Jérôme Carcopino
- **La vie quotidienne en Egypte au temps des Ramsès**, Pierre Montet
- **La vie quotidienne en Palestine au temps de Jésus**, Daniel-Rops
- **La vie quotidienne des Aztèques à la veille de la conquête espagnole**, Jacques Soustelle

SOURCE MATERIAL (Fictional)

- **Penelopiad**, Margaret Atwood
- **The Silence of the Girls**, Pat Barker
- **The Women of Troy**, Pat Barker
- **The Odyssey**, Homer
- **The Iliad**, Homer



A BRIEF HISTORY OF SUN COUNTY

I write to you in good faith, my Brother in Words. You asked for Knowledge so that you might understand my People. I choose to put my trust in your intellect and disregard the nasty rumors about politics. I'd like to think we are above such things after what we went through in Furthest. I have collected here a brief history of Sun County, at least the part of which might serve to help You understand Us. It is curated as best I am able; I assume that if all you wanted was the List of Counts and Deeds you would not have pleaded so earnestly for my objective opinion. I hope that this might Illuminate your path, and that the political climate might shift so that we once more can converse openly under the Dome Above.

– Hendrus Cleareye, excerpt from an intercepted letter to Lunar agents.

It is impossible to understand the people of Sun County without knowing its history. While the average farmer will know few details, everyone knows the good old days of the Peaceful Era, the strife during the Solitude of Testing, and the politically volatile situation since the trade routes reopened. Every child learns to recite the various reigns of counts, and heroic individuals have created a legacy that means that stories are still told of their reign, regardless of how garbled they might have become over the years.

THE PEACEFUL ERA (YEAR 877-1200)

The founding of Sun County is entwined with the fate of Pavis and Dragon Pass. This is something seldom talked about in these days of fierce independence. Indeed, listening to stories of the early days, one might get the impression that Sun County and its people appeared from nothing, formed from a union of the river and the cold sun. Much knowledge has been lost or distorted during centuries of struggle, and the stories remembered are the ones that reinforce what people want to see themselves as, not necessarily the truth as it happened.

The tale of Sun County's unique strengths has been used as a shield against outside pressure and a spear to threaten those who would not fit the norm. To do that, history has been remembered but adjusted to fit what the current Count wants it to be. That the original Sun County settlers were mercenaries from Dragon Pass has been downplayed, and the knowledge that the lands they were graciously granted by the King of Pavis already had people living there has been largely forgotten.





Pavis

Originally known as Robcradle, Pavis is the largest city in the region. It's not part of Sun County but an independent city-state founded on the upper reaches of the Zola Fel river by God Learners to plunder the giant magical cradles floating downriver. This angered the giants, whose offspring had been traveling in the cradles, and the city was razed to the ground with the help of the local nomads. In 830, the future demigod Pavis retook the city in what is remembered as the "Too Tall Battle," eventually making a tentative peace with the nomads. A massive stone city was built with dwarven help, and the city of Pavis was born. Historically it has been an important trading partner for Sun County.

877: THE FOUNDING

Pavis's successor, King Joraz Kyrem, requested aid from Dragon Pass to defend against the recurring giant attacks threatening the city. Many warriors who answered the call worshiped Yelmalio, the cold sun. These templars helped protect the city and were rewarded with fertile land along the river to the south so they could bring their families and settle. Thus was Sun County founded.

This is the story that everybody knows and which is repeated in local legends and tales. People rarely discuss why the templars chose to settle instead of returning home and what happened to those already living on the newly gifted lands.

The battle for Pavis took place during the time of the Empire of the Wyrms Friends (EWF), whose claws reached far and made the Praxian nomads retreat towards Genert's Wastes. Why the followers of Yelmalio answered the call to arms has been lost to history, but the learned theorize that it was due to a growing dissatisfaction with the guiding principles of the EWF. Their loyalty was to Yelmalio and the Dragon Pass Sun Dome, and establishing a new base of operations on the edge of the Empire was seen as a wise choice. However, that is only speculation and should not be taken as truth, no matter how persuasive the argument might be.

The King of Pavis had a good reason for offering land to these Yelmalian mercenaries. The rich grazing lands along the Zola Fel had so far been inhabited by a mixture of Praxian nomads, as well as semi-nomadic river folk and newtlings, traditionally friends of the giants. Replacing hostile natives with foreign allies greatly secured Pavis' southern border.

The templars quickly drove off the nomads, made a tentative peace with the river folk, and started building their distinctive walled settlements as they put the fertile land under the plow. In their minds, they were the first proper settlers and caretakers of the land; the golden fields of barley and high adobe walls were proof of that.

877-1004: ARINSOR CLEARMIND

Arinsor Clearmind was the leader of the Dragon Pass Sun Dome mercenaries and became the first Count and founder of Sun County. He ruled wisely for 27 years and fathered many sons and daughters. It is said that he was so devoted to Yelmalio that he glowed with an inner light when surrounded by darkness.

Arinsor was the one who first met Kinope, the daughter of Zola Fel, as he was traveling downriver. He was as smitten with her beauty and grace as she was with his honor and character, and together they enacted the ancient rite of Yelm and the Oslir River. An accord was struck between the people of the land and the river where the Count vowed to protect the Zola Fel against dangers and defilement while the Zola Fel would help irrigate the land and keep it green and fertile.

Everything was good. The first Sun Dome was built, and walled villages and towns were founded up and down the river. More settlers from Dragon Pass joined their friends and relatives in this new venture. The families counting their lineage back to these original settlers are the oldest ones, and the noble families use the "gold" term in their name to signify this. They are known as the "golden" lineages.

Sun Dome Temples

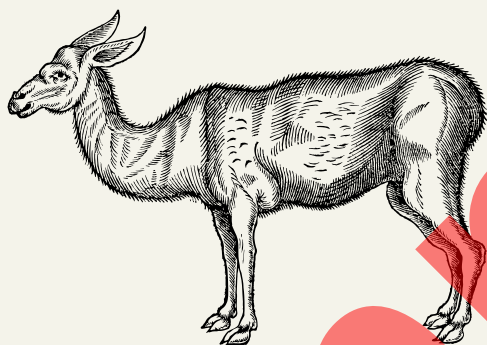
There are fifteen autonomous Sun Domes, each a grand temple to Yelmalio with many subordinate smaller temples and shrines attached. Each temple follows a similar design, though there are local variations in material and style. It is generally agreed that the Sun Domes in Dragon Pass and Saird are the most important, though this is often overlooked as they have to share prominence with other cults of equal and greater strength, mainly Orlanth and the Seven Mothers. In contrast, the Sun County Sun Dome (sometimes called Mo Baustra in Prax by people abroad) has no peers. It is the heart of a deeply religious society ruled according to the tenets of Yelmalio.

The fact that the current Sun Dome in Sun County is the second one constructed is rarely mentioned. The old one lies in ruins, and people are forbidden to enter.

1093-1140: ZEBROKITH THE BOW

Under the rule of Count Zebrokith the Bow, it became evident that the decision to settle in Sun County had been wise. The Empire of the Wyrms Friends had turned cruel and corrupt, and every righteous Yelmalian revolted against them. The Dragon Pass Sun Dome was razed to the ground, and many refugees fled to the safe isolation of Sun County. Large and arcane weapons were built to defend against possible dragon encroachment, but the EWF collapsed before they had to be used.

In the end, the dragons rose against the people who had served them, and every single human inside the borders of Dragon Pass was exterminated. During this troublesome time, Count Zebrokith led his country safely through the crisis, urging patience and isolation rather than rash action. He ruled for 47 years of stability and would have been remembered as one of the great leaders of Sun County had the people not been so quick to forget the horrors of the Dragonkill War.



The Solitude of Testing: gone but not forgotten

The Solitude of Testing refers to the centuries of isolation Sun County suffered after the extinction of humanity in Dragon Pass and the subsequent fall of Pavis. Surrounded on all sides by hostile nomads, it was as if the rest of the world had ceased to exist. This ordeal transformed Sun County into what it is today, an isolationist culture obsessed with cohesion and self-sufficiency. It is used as a political tool to shame dissidents, cast suspicion on outsiders, or enthuse people when working on communal projects. Old people still remember the tales of their parents and grandparents; it has not been that many decades since the isolation was broken. The Solitude of Testing remains fresh in people's minds through proverbs, songs, and tales of the Hard Old Days.

THE SOLITUDE OF TESTING (YEAR 1200-1575)

Three major events came together to ensure Sun County's isolation from the rest of the world. The first one was the fall of the EWF in 1120. The Dragonkill War, as it came to be known, ended with the slaughter of all humans in Dragon Pass. After this traumatic event, the area was avoided for centuries. Sun County was now cut off from its roots; what relatives and friends people had left behind as they moved east were now dead.

The second one was the Closing of the Oceans soon after. With this curse, ocean travel became impossible, and Feroda, the small seaport at the mouth of the Zola Fel River, was abandoned. Sun County was officially landlocked.

The third blow came with the fall of Pavis to trolls after decades of attacks in 1237. The gates of Pavis were sealed, and what human inhabitants survived fled into the countryside or remained hidden. Some fled south to Sun County, eventually intermarrying into the local population. Many Pavic loanwords still pepper the local Heortling dialect, especially concerning city-related matters. With the fall of Pavis, all trade routes were blocked by hostile nomads and trolls, and Sun County was forced to become self-sufficient.

Despite the name, the Solitude of Testing was not a lonely vigil. There was still interaction with the surrounding nomads, sometimes hostile and sometimes friendly. Little by little, Praxian ideas and traditions started to fuse with Yelmalian ones, people intermarried, and some of their descendants settled along the river. New Praxian words became common in everyday speech, but perhaps the greatest adoption of ideas was around the concept of survival and what that entailed.

Left to their own devices, the people of Sun County formed a survival covenant with themselves. Things were going to have to change in order to stay the same.

1140-1224: ZOLAN THE CRUEL

The Solitude of Testing began during the reign of Zolan the Cruel, a great leader who ruled for eighty-four years. People say that if it hadn't been for him, Sun County might have fallen to the nomads in the first century of isolation and been nothing but ruins and memories. Zolan kept order in the chaos, and people adapted and fortified their steads. Infighting and old grudges were no longer allowed; all would stand together against the nomads. People still whisper of the cruel examples Zolan would make of those who would disturb the unity in this time of trials.



The sons and descendants of Zolan ruled for another century of stability until the assassination of Zolan IV in 1328. During this time, the people of Sun County sacrificed the use of their horses to appease the nomads and their hatred of the beasts. Instead, they adopted Praxian herd beasts, especially the Sable antelope for transport and the hardy Impala for meat.

1225-1529: PRAXIAN INFLUENCE

After the heirs of Zolan, several powerful local Yelmalian warlords or Praxian Khans named themselves Count of Sun County, few lasting more than a handful of years. Some Khans were fellow sky cultists, and things were stable and predictable due to shared cult ideals. It was not uncommon for nomads to worship the Sun Daughter, as the nomads call Yelmatio, or even the great Sun Hawk Spirit. During these times, the Counts sacrificed at the Sun Dome temple and followed similar taboos and traditions. Boburto the Impala Rider (1389-1401) and his many sons are remembered as good Counts, still strangers, but also understandable.

Other Khans followed Waha or Stormbull, and during those times, Sun County was treated much like any other oasis; a place to collect tribute from and little more. As a result, many people in Sun County have nomad blood, and several noble families draw their lineage back to these counts. These are called “copper” lineages.

Some notable counts remembered in the stories are Count Skindilli Longlegs, a Llama Rider who ruled for nineteen years (1439-1458), drove away Daga, and ended the bad drought. Another Count, much venerated, started out as one of the native Sun County warlords of the time, Narakoris the Wise. He belonged to the ancient Goldshield family and ruled for forty years (1458-1498), strengthening the martial traditions of Sun County by focusing on spear and shield drills for the general populace.

THE FIRST VISITORS (YEAR 1537-1575)

While these last decades are counted as part of the Solitude of Testing in official timekeeping, the world slowly opened up. In the west, the warring tribes of the resettled Dragon Pass were united into a kingdom by the enigmatic Sartar. After King Sartar was apotheosized, his son Saronil took the throne and continued the expansionist Sartarite agenda. Merchants, adventurers, and official expeditions travelled widely abroad. Some found their way to the ruins of Pavis, others to Sun County, and further to the lands of the east, beyond Genert’s Wastes.

1537-1556: COUNT POSKUTURRI CRIMINAL SLAYER

Count Poskuturri of the Impala Riders ruled for nineteen years after having ended the long line of kin-slaying Gold brothers. They were a series of Counts belonging to the Gold family, one of the noble families of the founding who had grown inbred and corrupt. The Gold family is considered extinct, though people still whisper that violent and quarrelsome men have “a touch of the Gold.” Poskuturri was a wise and pious man of the Impala tribe and had no children. As strangers arrived, Sun County regained contact with the world beyond the plains at the end of his reign. The conservative Count tried to keep all outlander influence at bay, but he would be the last of the “copper” line of nomad Counts.

1539-1544: THE DRAGONEWTS’ DREAM

This was a time of many strange events, collectively called the “dragonewts’ Dream.” A magical ceremony that was centered around the ruins of Pavis spilled out into the surrounding lands, including Sun County. A small trading post called the City of Thieves had sprung up outside the walls of old Pavis, and many of the people traveling there from Sun County bore witness to the strange events. It ended with the breaking of the troll gates and their dominance over the old city (these days called the Big Rubble). People who still remembered tales of their ancestors, refugees from the EWF, whispered of dark days ahead as dragon magic slowly returned to the world.

1547: THE PROPHET AND THE PRINCE

This was the year the Prophet Monrogh and Prince Tarkalor, grandson of the great Sartar, King of Dragon Pass, passed through Sun County. They traveled as part of a royal expedition that headed back through Sun County after exploring the distant Teshnos on the other side of Genert’s Wastes. This visit was another sign that the world was opening up, and news and stories of distant realms were shared. Some say that the handsome and redheaded Prince Tarkalor fathered many children here, and redheads are still teased as being descendants of one of the prince’s bastards.

The Prophet Monrogh learned much about Yelmatio’s ways from the archives at the Sun Dome and shared the Vision of the Many Suns he had received in Teshnos in return. People re-learned the secrets of Yelm, whom the Teshnos people call Shomash, and the long-forgotten rites of Dayzatar, the distant archivist of light and protector of scholars. Count Poskuturri was less pleased and did not approve of these new ideas. Monrogh then returned to Sartar to re-establish the Sun Dome temple destroyed by the EWF.

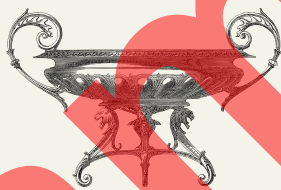
1550: THE FOUNDING OF NEW PAVIS

Dorasar was one of the many relatives of King Sartar of Dragon Pass. After a tragedy changed his life, he traveled east to found a city where he could preserve what he perceived as the old and righteous ways. He and his many allies arrived at the ruins of Old Pavis, near the site of the City of Thieves. The rich artifacts rumored to be hidden within the Big Rubble were a big draw for many of the people joining him.

Dorasar allied with the local river people led by Ingilli the Fisher, as well as Sable Riders, Zebra Riders, and Ginkizzie the Dwarf, who spoke for the descendants of the original inhabitants who had been clinging to the ruins. They used old city magic to set the new city boundaries next to the giant walls. The spirit of Pavis himself awoke and blessed the venture, and the city was named New Pavis (Pavis for short). Dorasar came from a city and road-building dynasty well-versed in dwarven secrets; thus, the city was built fast, cleanly, and orderly.

One of the allies that had arrived with Dorasar was Varthanis, a Yelmlio follower of the Prophet Monrogh out of Dragon Pass. He brought many templar warriors with him and was rewarded with his own district in New Pavis. This is now called Sun Town. Some say he wanted to become Count of Sun County but Count Poskuturri spotted his ambition and quickly blinded and “retired” his greatest supporter, the high priest Zentakos. Without him, Varthanis lacked local support.

Perimedes the Chaste became the High Priest of Yelmlio in Sun County after Zentakos’ retirement. He was young for this important role but very pious and remained a high Priest for many decades.



Blinding

Blinding has been a traditional punishment in Sun County since ancient times. The punishment can be administered in different ways; the most merciful one is to force the criminal to stare directly at Yelm’s light for a full day. Other traditional methods use burning or blades, either to only damage the vision or to remove the eye entirely. The method of staring directly at Yelm is sometimes self-administered by very pious Yelmlians, who voluntarily choose to follow their god into eternal darkness.

1551-1564: TARKALOR TROLLKILLER’S WAR

Prince Tarkalor offered gold in exchange for fighting the trolls of his homeland to secure his kingdom. Many took him up on the offer; this was one of the first of many mercenary expeditions abroad. Some templars returned with friends and wives, and a new wave of Sartarite settlers started to trickle in from both Sartar and Pavis.

1556-1567: ZENTAKOS THE BLIND

After the death of Count Poskuturri in battle, Zentakos the Blind was brought out of his retirement to take the role of Count. By then, he had lost his vision from staring at the sun for six years isolated inside his retirement tower. He was a pious man who was increasingly uncomfortable with the political pressure and increasing rivalry between the Sun Dome and Sun Town of Pavis. Some say he was a puppet of Varthanis, now Light Captain of Pavis, but others deny those allegations. He eventually fell down a set of stairs and broke his neck. He is the first of the “bronze” counts, with ties to the newcomer Sartarites.

COUNT VARTHANIS BRIGHTHELM (YEAR 1567-1593)

Count Varthanis ruled strongly, if not always wisely. However, he had strong military allies and friends in Pavis, which were needed in the changing times. These were tense years, with repeated attacks by Praxian nomads trying to retake their lost grazing lands. However, Count Varthanis repelled them with the aid of his Sartarite friends. He took the name Brighthelm to signify his victories (his detractors called him Brasshat and a Sartarite puppet.)

He brought back several old laws to try to purge nomad influences from Sun County. Among these were forbidding men to wear women’s clothes which was directly aimed at some shamanic traditions, as well as trying to eradicate the widespread hazia and alcohol abuse. He was viewed with suspicion by the old “gold” and “copper” families, but they saw the usefulness of allying with the new powers. Many men and women fell out of favor during his reign and were exiled, blinded, or worse. Their lands were instead given to new Sartarite immigrants loyal to the Count.



1575: THE SOLITUDE OF TESTING ENDS

A delegation from Tarkalor, the new King of Dragon Pass, arrived in a stately procession to Sun County bearing gifts and promises of future alliances. His forces helped drive off the nomads, and Sun County's centuries-long isolation was officially broken as the caravan routes were safe once more. This is seen as the official end of the Solitude of Testing.

COUNT VARTHANIS II THE RED (YEAR 1593-1613)

The reign of Count Varthanis II (also called the Red Count) lasted for nineteen years. He was the son of Count Varthanis Brighthelm, but unlike his father, he was a mystic, a heroquester, an elf-friend, and by all accounts, a strange man. Under his reign, hazia was legalized and used openly, and the Lunars were greeted as friends and trading partners when they arrived.

1593: THE SUMMER OF LOVE

This was the new Count's first year, and he decided to start it with a bang. He performed a grand heroquest ritual together with the elves of the Big Rubble during Sea Season, which led to a fantastic harvest. He proclaimed a year of celebration, old banishments were forgiven, and it was a time of forgiveness and reconciliation. After this, hazia grew more strongly than ever and quickly became a major export product.

1598: THE OPENING

The opening of the seas had by now reached the mouth of the Zola Fel River, and trade was possible by ship once more. However, there was no longer a port city there, just a swamp filled with giant mosquitoes and some ruins inhabited by newtlings and fishermen. Still, ambitious people elsewhere took note of the new possibilities.

1602: SARTAR FALLS

After many years of war, the Lunar Empire finally conquered the kingdom of Sartar. Consequently, there was a big influx of Sartarite refugees to Pavis as they sought to outrun the Lunar reach. They were unpopular,

Hazia

Hazia is an herb that, when smoked or inhaled, causes a euphoric experience and a feeling of oneness with the universe. Its effects are similar to Discorporation; as such, it has been used to assist with religious or spiritual rituals. It grows well in Sun County soil, but as it is also addictive, it is often banned and seen as harmful to the Sun County spirit. When use is less frowned upon, it forms a valuable export crop.

The most psychoactive part of the plant is the stamen of the flowers, though many also smoke the rest of the plant. It can be mixed with other herbs if desired; this is often done to mask the distinctive scent.

and many saw them as violent troublemakers and rebels. Some, however, were Yelmalian and were welcome to settle in Sun Town or Sun County.

Following the refugees were Lunar traders and spies, settling down in Pavis to prepare for the next step of the Lunar expansion. This led to many trading opportunities for ambitious families in Sun County, who grew rich by exporting hazia and importing foreign luxuries. These trading endeavors were supported by the Count, and the families that prospered were called the new "silver caste."

This influx of foreign immigrants and ideas rocked the foundations of Sun County, and everyone has an opinion about it, good or bad.

1608: THE FIRST LUNAR INCURSION

The Lunar Empire tried to subdue the tribes of Prax in a grand battle, but it ended in ignominious defeat. A change in tactics was needed and the Lunars focused on building alliances in Pavis and Sun County and turning the Praxian tribes against each other.

During this volatile time, Solanthos Ironpike was elected Light Captain of Sun Town in Pavis. He was not in favor of the Lunar presence, and Sun Town grew increasingly conservative in contrast to the open culture of Sun County. Count Varthanis II gifting his Sun Town palace to the new Lunar ambassador was especially unpopular among these conservatives.

In Sun County, there were ongoing negotiations to marry the Red Goddess (in the form of her High Priestess Tala Errio) to Yelmalio (in the form of the Count) to secure a permanent alliance. These were led by the Light Keeper Karial the Pure. The big issue was that Yelmalio was already married to Ernalda and was notoriously monogamous. Mythical research began to try to provide some form of workaround or precedence.

1610: NOMAD DEFEAT AT MOONBROTH

The Lunar Empire defeated a collection of Praxian tribes (mainly Bison and Impala Riders with Bolo Lizard and Rhino support) at Moonbroth Oasis with the help of their Sun Dome and Sable Rider allies. After this loss, the defeated tribes moved into Genert's Wastes, and the Sable tribe took over their good grazing lands in Prax. After this battle, the Lunar Empire was considered to be in control of Prax and Pavis, and Sor-eel was installed as governor.

The biggest change for Sun County was that missionaries of the Seven Mothers became a common sight, proselytizing freely in the towns and villages. The Red Count also gained an honor guard of Lunar Hoplites as thanks for his continued support. General Eritus Armemnon of the Lunar Army was permanently stationed at the Sun Dome as an honored guest.

With the nomad threat removed, the salt mines of Pent Ridge in nearby Vulture Country were safely reopened. The Sable Tribe was given access to the salt lick on top while the mines were remade into a penal colony. Digging out salt is hard and thankless work, and the Count declared that criminals should repay their debt to society by working there. This was seen as less barbaric than the old ways of flogging, blinding, dismemberment, or burning. However, some whispered that this was yet another sign of Lunar influence and that it might end in the adoption of slavery as punishment for certain crimes in the future.

In the Armistice of Prax, the lands along the Zola Fel River south of Sun County were gifted to the Lunar Empire. The High Llama tribe, who had traditionally dwelled there, took over some of the Bison tribe's grazing lands in Prax, and Lunar settlers moved in to replace them. These lands were called the Grantlands, and most Sun County inhabitants were relieved to have civilized neighbors to the south. All looked set for an official alliance between Sun County and the Lunar Empire.

The Importance of Salt

Every animal needs access to salt to stay healthy, and traditionally salt and metal weapons have been common trade goods for the various nomad tribes. Like watering holes and good grazing, a salt lick is a resource worth fighting for. With the Pent Ridge salt lick and the underlying mines under Sun County control, this has opened up new avenues for trade. The export of salt has the potential to become a major source of revenue, as it is essential for food preservation. Great quantities of salt are used by both the Pavis fishing industry and the Lunar army.

1613: THE STARBROW REBELLION

The Starbrow Rebellion erupted in Sartar, throwing the Lunar occupation forces into disarray. The Lunar garrison of Pavis was depleted to send back troops to help suppress the uprising. Taking advantage of the volatile situation, the Light Captain of Pavis, Solanthos Ironpike, challenged the Lunar General Armemnon to a duel and slew him on the fields outside the Sun Dome. He subsequently captured Varthanis II and named him a traitor before blinding and imprisoning him. He proclaimed himself Count Solanthos Ironpike.

COUNT SOLANTHOS IRONPIKE (1613 – NOW)

Count Solanthos Ironpike now rules Sun County, slowly purging it of Lunar and other heretical influences. The Seven Mother missionaries have been politely deported, Lunar troops forbidden to march through Sun County, and foreign trade put back in the hands of the Lokarnos cult. Hazia is banned, which has lost many newly wealthy families their income, and Sun County one of its greatest exports. There is still a cautious peace with the Lunar Empire; Lunar troops are allowed to travel by boat downriver to the Grantlands and the newly founded port of Corflu. Etyries merchants are still allowed in Helmbold to trade, and diplomatic relationships are cordial but strained.

After his forced retirement, Count Varthanis II's closest allies have either chosen exile in Pavis, been demoted, deported to unimportant country villages, or bowed their heads and sworn fealty. This is a tense time of political maneuvering and changing fortunes.

GM notes: While the main focus of this book is set between 1615 and 1620, some people might want to use it for campaigns set with the new RuneQuest: Glorantha starting date of 1625. This is not a difficult adjustment, as one thing is sure: The more Sun County changes, the more it stays the same. In order not to make people feel locked into a "canon" 1621-1625, that tumultuous period is described in the chapter The Situation in 1625 on page 221, later in the book. Please note that this is not a set future, only a path of least resistance to use if you choose to run from 1625.



THE PEOPLE OF THE LAND

The marketplace in Sun Dome town might look as diverse as the markets of Pavis, but don't be fooled into thinking that is the case. People might be blonde and bearded, swarthy and tall with brown hair, or short and dark with coiled hair like the Impala nomads. They are still citizens of Sun County and would have each other's back over a stranger like us. As diverse as their looks can be, their faith in Yelmadio binds them together. Treat them fairly, or it will get back to them.

– Illinath, Etyries trader

Sun County was settled in three great immigration waves, all of which have left their mark on the people. As such, there is no typical Sun County look, though blond hair is far more prevalent than in the surrounding areas, so that tends to be what strangers notice first. Add to this that gold has a religious significance to the Yelmadio cult, and it is easy to understand why people with blond hair are seen as the epitome of a pious Sun Domer. Many choose to dye and bleach their hair blond, and there are several different dyes with various nuances, some cheap, others prohibitively expensive.

Blond hair is considered a status symbol and is seen as a social divider; golden hair hints at belonging to an old “golden lineage”. In true Sun County fashion, everyone is equal, but some people are more equal than others.

LINEAGE

There is no such thing as a Clan or a Tribe in Sun County, but there is a social distinction between who has lived here the longest. In game terms, lineage could be considered the Sun County version of tribe, but it's not the same. There is no natural hierarchy between different tribes, their status can change depending on their fortunes. In Sun County, a person's lineage follows a set hierarchal pattern.

While a person's lineage is important, it's not necessarily indicative of social class in matters of influence and other factors. A family that can trace its lineage back to the “gold” settlers is more likely to be of a higher social class than others, but with time and the rapid social change of the last two generations, it's just as likely that the family has come upon hard times and lost its privileges if they had any in the first place. However, there's often a certain respect for people belonging to the “golden” settler families. Even though a family might have fallen out of grace with the current Count, a good lineage would still earn them certain privileges, however superficial they might seem. They are likelier to be looked favorably on by others and are sometimes assumed to have a higher social status than they actually have.



THE ORIGINAL INHABITANTS

As cruel as it might sound, Sun County does not count the newtlings or the river people as part of its history. As far as most people are concerned, the land was empty when Count Arinsor arrived. While some river people married into Sun County families, most still travel along the Zola Fel, ignoring artificial boundaries. While they still have some influence in Pavis, in Sun County, they are pushed into the swamps. There, they make their floating villages of rafts and reed houses, moving with the current and the seasons. Some are official Sun County citizens and pay taxes in reedwork and fish, while others migrate as needed.

Many see them as shifty and rootless, one step up from smugglers and criminals. Despite this, they are a vital part of the Sun County river trade, and some families have become quite wealthy by operating riverboats. Few landlubbers choose to take up the river trade; most are born into one of these families. They tend to have strong connections to their relatives in Pavis. The Ingilli clan is one of the more influential ones, based in Pavis but with members living in Sun County.

THE GOLD SETTLERS

The original settlers came from Dragon Pass under the Empire of the Wyrms Friends. The old tales say they were tall, blond, brown-eyed warriors, and considering the prevalence of blond hair today, there's no reason to dispute the stories. Interestingly enough, blond hair is very rare in Sartar today, as all the people who would have lived there during the time of the great emigration were killed by the dragons.

While many families where blond hair is common count their lineage back to an ancestor from this first immigration wave, it is the noble families that take it most seriously. These families all have "gold" or "golden" somewhere in their family name, and most are scrupulous about preserving their ancient blood to the point of only marrying people of similar ancestry. They used to dominate Sun County politics but lost much influence after the Solitude of Testing ended.

What is often forgotten in this story is that much of the valley was already settled by river folk, fishermen, and farmers on the edge of the Zola Fel River. Many of them married into early settler families, so their blood is not as pure as they like to imagine.

Some well-known families are the Goldbreaths, the Oldgolts, the Goldshields, and the Goldenhairs.

THE COPPER GENERATIONS

During the Solitude of Testing, some occupying nomad forces married into local families and stayed. This took the form of women marrying Sun County men and nomad men taking Sun County wives while they were living in the valley. Add the local riverfolk population into the mix, and it is easy to see how the great variety of local appearances came to be.

People with "copper" generation ancestors generally have darker hair and skin. Many are short since the Impala Riders were some of the more common occupiers, and coiled hair is not uncommon. Others have the swarthy look and beards of the Bison Tribe or the olive skin and height of the High Llama people who used to occupy the southern stretch of the river.

These days, a nomad heritage is used as an insult by some. People can have a "touch of the skullbush," referencing the native plant as described on page 182. But in general, most people are proud of their ancestry, especially if they can count it back to one of the more popular Counts. Some women still worship Eiritha, and it is not unknown for her husband Waha to be venerated beside her, though it is rare that any man initiates into his mysteries unless he is a butcher by trade. It is not uncommon for someone of a "copper" lineage to retain some ties with the tribe their ancestors came from, especially if they arrived relatively recently. Some even have traditional tattoos, though usually under the clothes, where they can be easily hidden.

Ejskolli is one of the powerful noble families counting their line back to these days.

THE BRONZE IMMIGRANTS

The last immigration wave came from Sartar and brought yet more diversity. Red hair is often blamed on these late settlers, especially on the romantic escapades of Prince Tarkalor as he passed through in 1547. As the immigrants came from regular Sartarite stock, they tend to have olive skin, brown eyes, and dark or red hair. All the recent Counts have been of Sartar origin, and this is referred to as the "bronze" dynasty. While they don't have the clout to take a full "gold" name, they often use other terms like bright, shining, or lustrous to evoke their ties to Yelmatio. They get the nickname "brass" families as an insult. For example, Brightspear becomes Brassspear, or Brighthelm becomes Brasshat when you want to insult someone. For more information about recent immigrants and foreigners, see the chapter *The Tolerated Foreigners* on page 67.





COMMON CUSTOMS

To understand Sun County, it is important to examine some common cultural norms and how people see themselves. While some of these views might seem narrow-minded or even laughable from a cosmopolitan Lunar perspective, it is nonetheless vital to attempt to understand them. If they are ever to become Us, we must understand what makes them Them.

– *Inviolatus, Lunar scholar.*

INVINCIBLE UNDER THE LIGHT

Sun County is, at heart, a martial society. The shared story of the nation is one of fierce resistance against surrounding foes, of preserving against the forces of darkness and barbarity. A farmer is not just a farmer; in times of strife, he is also a soldier in the invincible shield wall. This national myth goes hand in hand with fierce patriotism and a conviction that Sun County is the best place in Glorantha to live and raise a family. Many people have a knee-jerk reaction when confronted with any challenge to their beliefs, often resorting to a loud “This is Sun County,” as described on page 62, keeping their mental shield wall as intact as their physical one.

In a militarized nation, every challenge to the status quo is met with weapon in hand. For physical foes, this has worked well. Sun County’s templar infantry is among the best, and they know it. When defending their territory, the cohesion and morale of a Sun County phalanx are second to none. Yelmalian men know that their shield wall is impregnable against barbarian mob tactics. As long as they maintain cohesion, they will win. If unity is lost, if Yelmalio abandons them, that’s when the dying starts.

Encouraged by their military successes, belief in unity, organized tactics, and self-discipline have spread throughout all aspects of Sun County life. Their way of fighting, meeting an army head-on in a decisive battle, with phalanxes covered by light skirmish missile troops, has turned into a dogma synonymous with honor. Only barbarians raid, avoid combat, and fight using guerrilla tactics. Sun County fights with honor.

Values discussed later in this chapter and others, such as unity, stoicism, cohesion, harmony, and tradition, all stem from Sun County military doctrine. Many outsiders see the pompous, rather stubborn Sun County citizens as people with too much flash and shine, too serious, and with dogmatic beliefs that seem disconnected from reality. To a Sun County Yelmalian, their ideals are not lofty. They are the result of hard-won experience. They are methods that they know will work to keep their society alive.

PROTECTING THE PEACEKEEPER

“You do what you are told. You fight honorably. You respect your opponent. You never, ever hurt a girl.”

– *Hydrimus, age four, showing Dad that he knows how to behave.*

One of the first things a boy learns is to never be violent, mean or unkind to girls. He’s their protector from all harm. No bad words, no hair pulling, no pushing. If you’re mean to girls, Ernalda’s daughter, Babeester Gor will come and do horrible things.

“I’m telling Auntie Babbygor, and she will come and chop your hands off and use them as a neckless, and evvyone will laff at your small hands, and then you’ll be sorry!!”

– *Tylanna, age four, making Hydrimus cry from shame and terror.*

If a Sun County boy gets really angry at a girl, so angry that he can’t control his emotions, he will probably punch her brother instead. If she hasn’t got a brother, he’ll have to get creative. It’s better to punch your own brother, or the closest tree than being violent to a girl. This sentiment carries over to adult life. Violence and disrespect towards women are seen as terribly unmanly. You can challenge women and debate with them (at your own risk), but never, ever raise your hand against them.

“You don’t fight girls, because they are soft and break easily. They’re kind of weird and spoil a lot of fun games by talking and stuff.”

– *Hydrimus, age 10, not really getting it.*

One of the first things girls learn is that they are more mature than boys their age. Boys are protectors. As such, they quarrel a lot. Boys fight all the time for dumb reasons or even no reason at all, just so they’ll be ready to fight for good reasons later. When the barbarians come.

With girls being considered more mature, they are the ones who are expected to make peace between boys. A sometimes tricky task since boys are so proud and take offense at the tiniest thing. Girls are taught to be mindful of not hurting their feelings and to use finesse and clever speech. Disparaging parents usually push some girls, their own or, in a pinch, their neighbor’s children, into a quarreling group of boys just to have some peace. Girls are thought of as peacemakers. They calm boys down and let them know when there is no reason for a fight. Really



they need to help out, no matter what. Here, it's a matter of honor and duty to help. Nearly all Sun County citizens share the Loyalty (Sun County), which dictates that it doesn't matter what class or lineage the cart driver comes from; as long as he's seen as a citizen in need, he will receive aid. To the citizens of Sun County, the shield wall is a collective defense of the entire county against foreign threats, not just something covering their local group. Even if the cart driver is strong enough to pull both beast and cart back on the road himself, others would help with whatever they could, maybe good advice or a prayer, and the man would let them, whether their actions were helpful or not.

Remuneration for aid, other than perhaps a modest, symbolic gift like a drink of water, wouldn't be expected, nor offered. The cart driver would offer thanks for the help with phrases like "the wall is strong" or "thank unity."

The benefit of aiding others is explained and understood by the Sartarite as a means to help himself in the long run. It's good for everyone, and reciprocity will mean that, in the end, it will benefit the individual. A citizen of Sun County, however, doesn't see the individual in the equation and doesn't understand how anyone could think of wanting to put themselves in front of the needs of others. Such behavior would make the shield wall impossible! Bragging about it or trying to derive some personal benefit from the situation would be nearly the same as stealing something from Sun County. Thus, a reward could, at best, be symbolic in nature or shared equally among everyone who helped, including the driver.

It goes without saying that the wall must never break, and no one wants to be its weakest point. It would be unthinkable to just pass by and not help. The only exception is if there's some other pressing duty that is more important to Sun County as a whole.

This is why a warrior on a zebra galloping by would automatically be excused, for example, as they clearly have an important task to perform for the good of all. If they are of good manners, the warrior might yell a "Forgive me" as they go past or feel obligated to let others know of the man's difficulties at the first convenient opportunity. This person might also go so far as to inquire of others if the man received help, or even seek him out to offer more formal apologies.

A noble passing by and neither letting some followers stay to help nor let one of them offer aid in their name would behave in the same manner. But it's also assumed that a failure to do so would be excusable since nobles are expected to work twice as hard and have ten times the responsibilities of regular people.

However, a foreigner or a member of a suspect cult would not receive this aid unless it seems beneficial to Sun County to aid him or to present a good impression. In other words, if the cart driver looks important enough to be of use to Sun County. A Yelmalian would be reluctant to help a follower of

Social Class

While social class will be dealt with later in the book, in short, Sun County has four social classes.

- **The Unfortunates** are the poor and rootless without land; stickpickers, beggars, and criminals.
- **Commoners** are farmers and regular citizens, the common man and woman.
- **Townies** live in the larger villages and cities; they are often craftsmen with a more cosmopolitan worldview.
- **Patricians** are rich and influential; they often belong to old noble lineages.

Orlanth unless they seemed like an established citizen who has adopted Sun County ways of dressing and talking.

Asking for help is natural, but it can be difficult for many. Asking for help demonstrates one's belief in the shield wall, and one's humble need of it, which is a good and responsible way to act. It shows maturity and common sense. But, since no one wants to feel like a weak point in the wall, one that sticks out by drawing attention to himself, this causes a bit of a dilemma for many citizens, most often men of the Yelmlio cult. A man alone and in difficulty often feels trapped between contradicting values. This is why, for example, the woman often asks the way, when a mixed company is lost.

For most men, it's easier to ask for help for a deed that is outside one's class, or proficiency, which shows again how often the differing classes interact and help each other just to maintain and save face. A group of men have an easier time since they can easily use the pronoun "we" without stepping on anyone's toes and mutually share the blame in an unsaid and acceptable manner. It's everyone's and, therefore, no one's fault. The wall still stands.

So, in most circumstances, the cart driver would likely not ask for aid, as he finds it terribly embarrassing to impose on others and to seem like the weakest shield-bearer in the wall. Women and the infirm are forgiven for asking for help, but it's usually introduced with an apology for inconveniencing others before stating: "My" cart is in the ditch, would you be able to help "me," please? This states responsibility for the accident and allows others to respond by glossing over the question of fault. The aided and the aider participate in a spontaneous exchange of pleasantries that puts everyone at ease. The best result of this meeting is one where everyone has helped resolve the problem,



Before the Summer of Love, the very idea of lewd revelries and widespread hazia use was so unthinkable that no one would even divine the gods and ask if this “social apocalypse” was coming or what one would need to do to avoid it. The Summer of Love was unimaginable. Then, it happened. Only when it was over and stamped out was the unthinkable possible to think about, but by then, it was too late. To divine the gods for answers to why it happened would be a risky political move if done in public. To this day, the Summer of Love is seen as a curious and terrifying hiccup that is so impossible and unlikely ever to happen again that it probably never really happened at all. Unfortunately, people won't stop talking about it.

NUDITY

For a brief period of magically infused time following the successful Heroquest of the Red Count, all restraints on the expression of love and the celebration of one's body were dropped for the citizens of Sun County. This is what is known as the Summer of Love. While the current regime will claim that Uleria cultists over-ran the cities and that normal people were fornicating openly in the streets, the truth wasn't anywhere near as extreme. While there were revelers who celebrated the loosening of the mores a little too excessively, most people were quite satisfied with being able to kiss, hold hands, and walk without a veil in public.

Today, such displays of affection are frowned upon and can even be a crime at the whim of the people in power. More about that in the *Law and Order* chapter on page 87. The popular support for the reintroduction of morality laws is divided. Most support comes from older Yelmalio and Yelm cultists, who often feel that the rules are too soft. In contrast, the lack of support is prevalent among Earth and Uleria cultists and the general public, who might support the law but would see it handled with moderation.

Ernalda and associated cults, the Babeester Gor in particular, but also followers of Uleria and Donandar, actively work against the efforts to tighten the rules further. Since these cults can truthfully claim, supported by divination, that the laws hinder their religious, and in the case of Uleria and Donandar, professional duties, their lack of support can be expressed openly as long as it's done in “good taste and within the means of the law.” The various and often imaginative protests have been somewhat successful, as seen in the Hoods to Veils Act, where the original concept of forcing women to wear thick hoods was scrapped in favor of thin veils that women could see and breathe through.

Ernalda and Babeester Gor initiates, not lay members, have also gained the right to perform some of their rituals in a “Public State of Undress for Ritual or Other Religious Duties” (PSUfRORD) status, which is sort of a legal free

zone where they can be semi-nude for communal services and rituals in public, as long as the practices are both communal, and private, for a brief period of time, and as long as at least twenty-two percent of their bodies are covered in garments no thinner than good quality linen, and while displaying no parts of nipples, areolas or genitals. This strange hybrid status of public and private for religious purposes of vital significance has led to many peculiar situations that have caused more mayhem and disorder than what some scholars said they were supposed to protect the citizenry from.

The permit was quickly exploited as the original definition of genitals was everything except the head and face, which is covered with hair. This, in turn, led to it finally being revoked until it could be rephrased into its current form, which is much lengthier than we would like to include here. A standard form has been included in the Appendix in case any player or GM would feel the need to, in true Sun County fashion, make life more complicated than it needs to be.

In the private sphere, which also includes communal, gender-separated bath-houses, one is allowed to be as nude as circumstances demand, as long as it's brief, responsible, and not an affront to good taste. This made many smaller bathhouses go out of business as they were too cramped for private booths and couldn't guarantee that their facilities allowed their guests to act according to the law.

Public and even private nudity is still seen as something shameful in Sun County culture. Nudity, as well as all the actions thereof, are seen as sexual, that is, shameful in nature. For an adult, it's not just seen as a sexual provocation but can also be interpreted as an infantilization of the individual and, thus, something very humiliating. Sun County visitors aren't advised to nurse or change a child in public. Visiting Earth cultists from Esrolia must adapt as soon as they enter the Sun County public. To the Cult of Ernalda, this is, of course, a provocation, and the fight continues every day on a battlefield that cuts straight across homes between the Yelmalio and Ernalda cultists who need to express their faith.

THE ART OF UNSEEING

As noted before, the Yelmalian and Sun County cultures, with their great affinity for the Fire/Sky Rune, are very visually oriented. When citizens are confronted with something that they find unattractive, distasteful, or bothersome to behold, whether it's a conflict in their midst that cannot be easily resolved, a nude body, or something else that affronts the eye, they have adopted the strategy of unseeing what is right in front of them. A good Yelmalio would discreetly turn his back or look in every other direction but straight at a nude woman, for example.



The lack of freedom that this entails for men is the primary reason behind the current Count's crackdown on affronts to the eye in public, trying to hide the female form behind veils and non-revealing clothes. Instead of having it remain a male problem, he has, in one swift, traditional stab of his spear, made it into a female problem instead. While this has appeased men for the moment, it has solved nothing in the long run. To turn a public quarrel into a private one is just an official adaptation of the unseeing technique.

GIFTING AND PAYMENT

"Look at all these lunars I have, could you somehow transform these into a golden necklace?"

— Yanos Lightfoot, exchanging gifts with a visiting Issaries merchant.

With the Lokarnos cult controlling the official trade, as described on page 76, alternative tactics have arisen where needed. In the countryside, "trade" is uncommon; instead, unofficial exchanges of gifts are the norm. People give lip service to the rules while acting in a manner approved by the local community. Nobody is paying for anything; goods exchanged are simply presented as gifts, and if one should receive a gift in return, that is merely polite behavior. Everyone agrees with the idea that you should not make money from your neighbors; you should all be in solidarity with each other. Different but the same. However, the result is that gifting has been monetized.

Semi-official gifting ceremonies are common when Praxian clans drop by isolated villages on the edges of Sun County. The nomads gift herd animals and leatherware in exchange for return gifts of agricultural produce, salt, and bronze. Everyone walks away happy, and nobody feels the need to get the Sun Dome involved. Local officials often choose to unsee these activities, though some get actively involved.

Another custom skirting the law is "gifting lunars." This way, you can magically transform a gift of simple lunar coins into objects such as an ox or an imported silk scarf. Visiting Issaries cultists often make these arguments, and a Goldentongue merchant can convince the staunchest Yelmalian traditionalist that the exchange was just, correct, and in no way a breach of the trade rules. Just a simple exchange of gifts between passing friends. Other Issaries merchants are dual initiates into Lokarnos, or work closely with them while in Sun County, enabling them to sidestep all the double-talk.

HOSPITALITY

Orlanthi hospitality originates from the myth of Umath, offering hospitality to Veskarten. Sun County hospitality, however, comes not from a godly gesture or a will to prove one's superiority but from sheer necessity. It's a word rooted in the myth of Nassis Caris and the Feeding of Hundred. In general, however, in both cultures, it's a matter of allowing people the freedom to travel. To go from one place to the next and bring the safety of home with them as a social currency.

In Sun County, hospitality is not seen as a deed to be praised or a transaction to be negotiated, but as a circumstance to be dealt with. Some unforeseen event has brought people together, and now they must endure it together by sharing resources or by standing together, metaphorically speaking, in a shield wall against the environment. Therefore, hospitality is mainly directed towards others of the same cult or culture with a common goal. Otherwise, it would serve no purpose other than to, perhaps in its worst case, weaken the shield wall's stability. Which in turn would turn a host from responsible to irresponsible. One does not share resources with outsiders since everyone but citizens is an enemy. Thus, symbolically speaking, the traveler's citizenry is the currency that pays for hospitality.

Being hospitable in Sun County culture means much the same as in other places. A citizen will expect shelter, protection, and food from their host. In exchange, the guest is expected to behave in accordance with The Hundred and do their best to maintain the pleasant and warm nature of the myth. Unity and not inconveniencing one's host are the main concerns. This gives a clue to why outsiders consider Sun County a xenophobic and unfriendly place to visit. To be received in someone's home, it's not enough to be able to pay one's way; one must adhere to the same ideals and know how to behave. Gaining entrance into a citizen's home, their private sphere, speaks of an intimate relationship where everyone drops their shields at the same time. A place where one can exchange ideas and emotions without worrying about the consequences.

Lately, hospitality has become an even more sensitive issue, with the reinforcement of the new-old rules of morality. Women have come to see the home as a sanctuary where they can safely drop their veils, and men have also come to see the private place of the house as the one place where they do not have to defend Ernalda against despoilers. In this manner, Count Solanthos' laws have caused significant change in a more wide-reaching manner than was intended. After reintroducing these new laws, hospitality has become even more of a loaded issue since the guest will be guaranteed to importune his hosts just by their presence.



Example: A wealthy Sartarite is traveling to Pavis, passing by Sun County on the way. He is caught out by bad weather and fails to make it to Helmbold as planned. He stops by at a wayside farm, offering gifts for hospitality for him and his men. To his surprise, the farmer is upset at the offer and replies loudly: "This isn't an Inn! It's my HOME!" The confused trader is lucky if he gets out of there without more than an earful.

Example: After sleeping many nights outside and attracting all sorts of inconveniences, such as sneeze spirits, the same Sartarite has picked up enough of the local culture to change his approach. Now, when he asks for hospitality, he's quick to lead off with the Sun County greeting and tossing everything but the kitchen bucket to show that he's a valuable guest, not an invader. "Dome above, Brother. I am an honest trader, offering wealth and unity to our mutual nations. Please allow me the great honor to, for a night while Yelm is dead, add my shield to yours and defend Yelmlio's splendor and his righteous wife Ernalda against the darkness jealous of their riches. Oh, warrior-farmer, I can't help but suspect that you are wedded to a lovely wife. Please, for my sake, I must ask you to accept this veil for her to wear if you would allow me inside your home so that I'm not struck blind by her beauty." Having shown in no uncertain terms that he's cultured, valuable, and aware of causing an inconvenience, while at the same time offering an easy out for his hosts, only the most stone-hearted citizen would turn him away.

IT'S IMPORTANT TO CHANGE TO STAY THE SAME

Consensus is an important aspect of decision-making in Sun County. While the state and all of its citizens are supposed to obey the laws and directives of the current Count, the everyday proceedings of farms, towns, temples, and districts are left up to the person in charge, who is responsible both to their supervisors as well as the people they are representing. Even a patrician farmer asks the council of his lands for advice on how to run it. It's said that patricians don't rule; they administer the Count's will. While Sun County is considered a patriarchy and, as such, families should be led by men, it's also often said in jest that men don't lead their families; they just administer the wife's will.

Tradition is important in Sun County, but so is change when necessary. To the outsider, Sun County policy changes can seem radical and often inexplicable. For years on end, a political suggestion can seem to have absolutely no popular support, and the next day, everyone agrees that a change was needed, and this one, in particular, was a very good one. Often, this strange comportment is described as blind allegiance to the Count. While it is true that the Count has a lot of power, he wouldn't be able to rule unless

he had support from the most powerful families, who, in turn, need wide popular support to retain their position in the class system.

Another factor to consider is civil behavior. Sun County citizens are proud of their civilized way of life. They spend a lot of energy on protocol, the proper way to administer the shield wall, and it's considered rude to cause strife in its midst. The wall isn't stronger than its weakest shield, after all. Despite the authoritarian rule and sedentary class system, discussions and debates are quite popular, and it's considered a duty for all citizens to be involved in local decision-making. Some of these discussions and debates are little more than show, as the outcome has already been decided from above, but others are just as sincere as they appear to be. And even if a discussion is expected to go one way, it will do so only for as long as it doesn't.

One way to politely disagree with an evident truth is to state one's agreement and then say nothing more on the subject. This is usually a way of testing the water. While words are important, body language signals whether a subject is open for discussion or if it's a lost cause from the start. Consensus exists until it's challenged by a declaration that seems innocent. Then, it builds momentum until it becomes the new consensus when no one disagrees.

Example: Joy Goldbreath, a charismatic and erudite young woman from a rich family, wants to set up a shrine to her goddess, Chalana Arroy, in the local Ernalda temple. At the first temple meeting, Joy, who is used to getting her way, tests the waters by stating that she is a healer by profession and an initiate of Chalana Arroy. Everyone present agrees, either by nodding or offering support. The Ernalda Priestess goes so far as to say that Joy is an excellent healer. Others say that they are glad to have her in the village. Some just nod. One or two say nothing. Joy is happy; this looks good, but she says nothing more.

For her next meeting, she has paved the way for her move by visiting the people who said nothing, talking to them about this and that, and letting them again know that she's a healer and useful. To her interlocutors, this is seen as her making a play and asking for support. They can guess what she's after because it's an obvious move on her part. At this point, they could politely disagree with her by saying nothing or changing the subject to show that they wouldn't support her. Or, they could start talking about the passage of time to let her know that they felt that her idea was something for the future, or perhaps that it would be wise to see what happens before deciding, to let her know that they want more information of her intentions, before picking a side. Joy's charisma makes it hard for anyone not to nod and agree to her face. After all, there is no denying that she's a healer and an initiate in good standing of a powerful healing goddess.

At the next temple meeting, Joy continues her crusade by stating that the Ernalda temple doesn't have a shrine to



Chalana Arroy. Everyone agrees to this, either by nodding or saying yes. This is her chance! Joy orates on how practical it would be to have one. At this point, the Ernalda priestess becomes aware of her plans and responds that it's certainly a possibility. Which means that it isn't. Everyone agrees with this statement, even Joy.

Later, at a fifth meeting, Joy has further shown her worth as a healer and how a shrine would give her the means to commune with her goddess on a more regular basis. Over the last meetings, her supporters have grown in number, and now, they state the obvious in the temple meetings: that Joy is a very good healer, and so on and so forth. At this point, the priestess capitulates in the face of the inevitable. "Of course," she says, "we're about to start building a shrine to Chalana Arroy." Everyone is happy. No one was insulted or humiliated, and everyone was right. It's a great day for the village.

With this in mind, it's hard for an outsider to understand how true dissent in Sun County can be safely expressed and even miss the long work of preparation for a change. They only see the sudden and unexpected moment when a change occurs. It's even harder to imagine how an autocracy like Sun County manages to sniff out dissenters and punish them when they make such an effort not to look like they have any differing opinion, or one at all for that matter. While good politicians, and in Sun County, that means the ones that manage to stay alive, know how to talk without looking as if they're saying much, the powers in place are just as skilled in knowing what isn't being said. This play of the unsaid often leads to punishments that hardly seem to fit the crime. To the outsider, a crime against the state can seem arbitrary at best when a person can be blinded or burned alive for having done nothing more than agree with the consensus with admirable passion.

GM notes: It should be up to the player to decide which Passions are Public and which ones are Private. You might still believe in them all, no matter how contradictory they might seem. Sun County citizens are very good at compartmentalizing their differing life experiences and can quite literally separate them between "That was then, this is now." However, a PC can't switch his Private Passion to Public unless there's been a change in consensus. While this might seem open to abuse, and it can be, the GM is encouraged to make the players borderline paranoid about when and where they can be considered in Public or Private. This is also open to interpretation, and just how close friends one is with one's compatriots.

INSIDE AND OUTSIDE, THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LIFE

Most citizens of Sun County live in permanent residences, just large enough to house one family. This is in stark contrast to the Praxian tribes on one end, who might have tents the size of houses but move them often, and Sartarites on the other, who often live in communal dwellings with little private space. In Sun County, private space has become so common that it has become a standard of life, a right, even.

The home has become a part of the metaphorical shield wall. It shields its occupants from Yelm's harsh stare and from hostile foreigners. Inside and outside have quickly become not only two ways of referring to one's momentary state but two very different lifestyles. "Use your inside voice" is a common, loving admonishment from a wife or mother, while "take it outside" is a phrase that implies that everything bad should be kept outside the shield wall, not inside of it. In contrast, "that's an inside word" means that one should keep dirty words in one's head or at least where no one but one's family might hear.

Access to permanent housing has also led to a new way of looking at time. Outside, it is daytime, while inside, it is nighttime. "That was then, this is now" is another common expression, meaning that what a person said or did earlier, inside or outside, is expected to change when entering or exiting the private or public sphere. This allows citizens a lot more personal freedom than a foreigner might guess. Especially considering that few foreigners are invited into a citizen's home. The saying "What happens inside, stays inside" suggests that whatever happens inside a person's house is like the gods, forever trapped in time.

To most citizens, making a clear divider between inside and outside is very important. The inside should be neat and comfortable and is often thought to represent a person's inner values and identity. The outside is the public face and represents how the occupants want to be seen by their neighbors.

Just as the arena changes, so does the citizen. Inside their house, they are free to express themselves however they want. A stoic, responsible man who does his duties diligently during the day might be a drunken fool inside his house. As long as this man keeps his two identities separate, everyone else can do the same, and stability is maintained. Likewise, a woman can be a soft-spoken supporter of her man's actions while outside, but inside, she might unleash her wrath upon him, and no one can interfere until it bothers the neighbors. After that, some action would be taken, usually a talking to by a mutually respected elder. Having disturbed your neighbors is just as rude as having behaved in a disagreeable manner as a guest.

Most homes are small, but richer families have enough space that their children have become accustomed to having



who want to play them, these women usually succeed in breaking out of the mold. Yelmalian men are often so stunned when confronted by female aggression that they stand aside and let them.

Some men are, of course, provoked by such women. But for most men, it's easier to smooth over the situation by claiming that this "rare and exceptional" woman "has the spirit of a man" (in the case of wanting to be a Yelmalian), of "being so fierce that no man was manly enough to tame her" (of women that prefer to set out on adventures instead of being trapped at home), or "so savage she more resembled a female beast" (in the case of Babeester Gor). There is a myriad of chauvinist excuses that men invent to let the "rare exception" go off and do as she wants. For patriarchal men, humiliation is as good a mother of invention as necessity.

Players playing male characters should also think about how their characters relate to the opposite gender and talk to the other group members about how to roleplay it. It's important to understand the difference between patriarchy and downright misogyny. The former might be an expression of the latter, but there is a difference between going along with learned cultural norms and acting on deeply held personal beliefs.

The average Yelmalian is not a wife-beating abuser who speaks ill of women. They treat them with respect and often frown at the way women are treated in the more conservative cultures, where Yelm and Dendara are venerated. Indeed, other men would intervene and try to set a man straight if he did because that is not Yelmlio's way. Besides, stopping that kind of behavior might save his life because, if things escalate, he might catch the attention of Babeester Gor. While the cultural climate of patriarchy is oppressive, no man wants to see himself as an oppressor. That is why it's so hard to fight.

While male privilege in Sun County is what it is, most men take it for granted and don't even notice the differences. However, some men actively oppose it. The Summer of Love opened a window to a new world that has been hard to close. In the effort to do so, the gender war has intensified, so it takes a valiant man to oppose patriarchy in public. A Yelmalian man can adapt to the situation in many ways, and most of them are likely to be as contradictory as Glorantha itself.

The more philosophical men have realized that they, too, are caught in gender stereotypes that they would like to rid themselves of but might feel threatened by the expectations of the very family that they'd want to set free.

The man lauding the strength and value of Ernalda is the same man who wants to protect her from being stolen, as an object, by other men.

One man might feel threatened by strong mother types while completely accepting a Yelmalian woman as a comrade in arms.

Another might come off as an aggressive patriarch with strong opinions on gender roles while being henpecked in private.

What is important to consider is that every player, regardless of gender, has to be comfortable with the role-playing at their table. No one player should be allowed to force other players to act in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable. If this means that the patriarchy in your Sun County is more set-dressing than a real obstacle or that everyone in your group is a liberated woman or a feminist ally, then so be it. Your characters are heroes, and Your Glorantha Will Vary.

A gamemaster should expect that in mixed-gender groups, there will be some people who have very strong opinions about the matter while others do not. The GM's responsibility is to ensure that everyone adapts to match a level where every player feels included and welcome in the game.

We hope that this chapter will inspire players of female characters to find a way to play as they wish in the game and not feel pressured to portray their characters in a specific way "for realism."

The authors of this book are by no means encouraging players to act out their own sexist fantasies at the expense of other people's enjoyment. On the contrary, we have, in our own campaigns, used it as a means to lash back against patriarchy.

INHERITANCE AND WIDOWHOOD

As the person responsible for the family and their wealth, the patriarch is the one who will receive the inheritance of dead family members. Then, he is socially expected to re-distribute the goods among the family as he sees fit. While it's technically possible for him to keep it all to himself or re-distribute it unfairly, a good reason will have to be offered to the rest of the family, or there's a chance that his position as patriarch might be challenged.

Example: Yakala is a Yelmalian woman married to a Gustbrand redsmith who is also a lay member of Issaries and Lokarnos. She is the patriarch of their household. Her husband's grandfather is still the patriarch of her husband's family, but since Yakala is considered the "man" of the relationship, it's her grandfathers that count. None of them are alive. If she has any Yelmalian older brothers, one of them would be the main patriarch of the family. If she's the oldest, then she's not only the patriarch of the household but of the entire family. If she falls in combat, her inheritance will go to the family patriarch. If that was herself, her oldest son would be the new patriarch if he is a Yelmalian. If he would be too young, or otherwise unfit, her husband might have to take on the role instead, or perhaps one of his grandfathers.

That's generally up to the families to sort out, as long as the information reaches the Sun Dome to be made official.

Example: Lodmilla is the widow of Kraitos, a Yelmalian templar. She has the option to join either her parents' household or dead husband's family and expect them to support her and her children. Traditionally, she would be approached by her dead husband's family first, if they are still alive, since by the marriage act, she's considered the equivalent of their daughter. If they can't or won't or if she is unwilling to take them up on their offer, she can go live with her parents or siblings instead. Lodmilla also has the option to declare herself a widow. Her dead husband remains as her patriarch and no one can challenge it for as long as she deems that that is the case. In practice, she's become the patriarch of her own household. The family patriarch would remain, however. She would change her name to Kraitoswidow as a sign that she was living independently and might not be interested in taking on a new husband. If she took her old maiden name, she could do so instead, which would mean that she's looking for a new husband.

Lodmilla eventually dies. If she had been living under her maiden name, her daughters would traditionally call themselves Lodmilladaughter. If Lodmilla had led a widow's life, they could be called Kraitosdaughter to honor their dead father.

Lodmilla's son would be called Kraitoson, as even in death he'd be the household patriarch. There's nothing to stop her son from taking on the name Lodmillason instead, but it would signal that he accepted his mother as the true patriarch of the household and doesn't challenge it. He could keep the name Kraitoson and still choose not to challenge her position, but to other people, his reason for doing so would be considered ambiguous. Most people would mind their own business, but the Sun Dome bureaucrats might want an answer to ensure he understood his rights and obligations.



THE BABEESTER GOR ANOMALY

With the rigid social customs of Sun County in mind, it's almost inexplicable how a cult that is as transgressive as Babeester Gor can still be considered legitimate in the eyes of the ruling elite. Yet they are, and furthermore, their members are nigh untouchable by the justice system and its armed arm, the militia.

To understand this anomaly, we must reconcile ourselves with the fact that their outrageous nature gives them their sanctified freedom to act. The grisly and distasteful rites of the cult, the rude, violent, and demanding nature of its members, and their lack of adherence to accepted gender roles are so beyond acceptable behavior that it makes it easy for the Yelmalians to unsee.

Further, with the injustices that are heaped upon the unfortunates and the poor, as well as the barely suppressed rage of the average woman that comes from living in a patriarchy where Ernalda is forced to veil herself to be accepted in public, it's perhaps not so surprising at all that the cult is still quite popular with the disenfranchised.

As long as the cult is so extreme, the elite can't take it seriously as a political threat in its own right. As noted, very few want to join. Those who do are people who, if not recruited by the cult, would have become outcasts, free-thinkers, and bandits. Several Counts are known to have said, "It's better that these crazies are controlled by Ernalda than not controlled at all."

While most philosophers, bureaucrats, and policy influencers see the Babeester Gor as part of the extremist fringe, extra-legal terrorists without a political agenda beyond their fetishized view of holy vengeance, others are more cautious about writing off their political power. In the end, they are a cult of fanatics with a tremendous capacity for violence, loyal to Ernalda rather than to Sun County and to the regime, which makes them a threat that needs to be checked.

Lately, the Count has wanted to curb some of the most flagrant threats to Sun County's monopoly of violence by making every Babeester Gor apply for written permission before performing her violent duties. The initiative was planned to handle vengeance-taking much like when duelists must co-apply for formal, written authorization to duel. This careful suggestion by the peace-loving Count was not taken in good grace by the more militant powers of the Ernalda temple, who saw it as a flagrant power play to turn the Babeester Gor into de-fanged symbolic temple guards. Considerable efforts of the temple went into having the initiative scrapped, but the proposed form for applying for vengeance is reproduced in the *Appendix*.

Thus, so far, the right of the Axe Sisters of Babeester Gor to continue to behave in flagrant disregard of propriety, honor, and dueling laws remains. The greatest incentive that keeps the cult in line is the very nature of its rites. They are so uncompromising and radical that very few women want to dedicate their lives to serving the cult. To polite society, it is unthinkable that a member of the higher classes



would join. Therefore, the social power of the cult remains insignificant and under the control of the Ernalda temple.

SKY AND EARTH

It is impossible to discuss patriarchy without discussing the competing pantheons of Sky and Earth. The Yelm-led Sky pantheon, of which Yelmalio is a part, is deeply traditional and patriarchal, to the point of venerating Dendara over Ernalda as an example of a nurturing goddess who understands her wifely duties. On the other hand, the Ernalda-led Earth pantheon is traditionally matriarchal, or at the very least, strongly rooted in the feminine. In Sun County, these two pantheons meet, as symbolized by the marriage of Yelmalio and Ernalda.

Traditionally, the Ernalda cult's attitude towards her husband-protectors has been one of tolerance. When her husbands have gone too far in their strange male ways, the goddess and her followers have used social means to curb their excesses. This power in social matters, as well as the ability to give life, has been enough to tip the scales between men and women into an even position in places like Dragon Pass. The subcult of Babeester Gor has traditionally been able to deal with more violent acts that aren't acceptable to either gender.

This balance has a different composition in Sun County. The rigid monogamous attitude of the Yelmalio cult goes against some of the very things that Ernalda sees as essential rights of womanhood. All husbands of Ernalda have their own particularities. Orlanth is rash and loud, Stormbull is violent and crude, but both of them accept Ernalda's essential womanhood and wouldn't dream of trying to cover it up. While some of the less suitable parts of the Ernalda myths can be solved with the traditional Sun County art of unseeing, like simply ignoring her other husbands, some parts of her worship are harder to stomach for Yelmalian traditionalists.

It is also important to note that Sun County lies on the edge of Ernalda's earthly influence. Prax and Genert's Wastes were severely depleted of fertility with Genert's death during the Great Darkness, and Eiritha is more commonly worshiped than her mother in the surrounding lands. In fact, Zola Fel is an important guarantor of fertility, having protected his valley during the sundering of Genert's Wastes. Through his daughter, Kinope, and the extensive irrigation networks, one could argue that water is as important as earth to the continuation of Sun County. While few people think about this in their daily lives, the underlying mythical tension is still there. One could argue that since Sun County itself (through the Yelmalio cult) controls the access to land, the lauded duality of Wife and Husband-Protector is actually a triad of Husband, Wife, and Mistress. Needless to say, this viewpoint is considered highly heretical.

MEN, NOT GODS

As customs and traditions are formed by men, not gods, they will inevitably vary in scope and strength as the needs of the surrounding culture shift. During the reign of the Red Count, the independent frontier nature of Yelmalio was celebrated, the son defending the land during his father's absence, forming his own family with his own rules rather than remaining subservient at home. One faction within the Yelmalio cult even pushed for the traditional monogamous marriage to Ernalda to be expanded with a second wife, the Red Goddess herself. This went too far for most and was one of the reasons why many embraced the coup and Count Solanthos' return to traditionalism.

Under the current Count, traditionalism and conservatism have been used as political and societal weapons to weed out the Lunar influence and return Sun County to its insular, unified nature. One of the victims laid on the sacrificial altar of political necessity has been the freedom of women. The terrible femininity of the Red Goddess and some of her champions have been held up as a threat equal to the nomad raids of the past, and in contrast, everyone has agreed that it is Good and Just that our women are "not like that." This has forced women into a more conservative position, where their old freedoms are now seen as foreign corruption.

While most sky pantheon cultures abhor nudity, Sun County was never as concerned with purity and pollution as many others. It is important to cover one's body as a contrast to the half-naked nomads, but in the last few years, this has been taken to new extremes when it comes to women's dress. Some say this is due to Count Solanthos' known dislike for female company, while others claim it is part of a strategy to weaken the Ernalda cult to strengthen the Yelmalio position. Regardless of the cause, the increasing strain between men and women now has a symbol: the veil.

THE VEIL

Veils have always been a part of the Sun County style of dress. While men often eschew the hats so common to Sartar to bare their heads beneath Yelm's light, many women resorted to veils and shawls to protect themselves from the scorching rays of Fire Season. Indeed, at times in history, wearing veils was also common among men, though they were called shawls or head wrappings to not confuse or distort the line between the sexes. However, what was once a practical garment has now become a symbol of the battle lines drawn between men and women. It is uncertain if Count Solanthos knew what he unleashed when he reinstated the old laws dictating that women should wear veils in public, but in the end, it doesn't matter.



The result is the same: a cold war in public, resulting in heated arguments in private.

In public, a woman must aspire to be humble and traditional, defending Sun County's values rather than succumbing to decadent Lunar ways. As a result, fashion has shifted towards more traditional forms, but the most important symbolic garment is the veil. While it is usually worn to cover the hair, it can easily be wrapped around the face to shield against the eyes of strangers. Worn as such, it can be a tool to help people unsee each other, and some women have embraced this as a tool of freedom from the eyes of men. Others see it as a tool of oppression, pointing out that as long as it is not the woman's own choice to wear the veil, it can never be a tool of liberation. Thus, the war is not just between men and women but between women themselves.

ERNALDA'S VIEW

While the cult of Ernalda in Sun County was never as steeped in nakedness and bare breasts as it is in the Esrolian heartlands, bare skin is still important. No woman should be ashamed of her body, and the cult holds that there is nothing inherently sexual, indecent, or Lunar about bare breasts or faces. However, given the current political realities, the official stance on wearing the veil is that it is akin to "covering themselves, as the earth covers itself with plants." Thus, the veils of Ernalda priestesses are often thin and see-through but heavily embroidered with flowers covering the face underneath. Others prefer heavier cloth decorated with beads and precious stones, symbolizing the treasures of the earth. Indeed, some have experimented with veils made entirely from beads or hammered copper pieces. Instead of being a humble garment, the cult has embraced it as a way to show the riches they bestow upon the land, adopting the visual language of the Yelmalio cult to show them up in public.

In contrast, the followers of Babeester Gor, traditional users of aggressive nudity, have taken to upsetting the status quo in other ways. Some would argue that it is more disconcerting to see an Axe Sister stalking the streets with

GM notes: Exactly how hard this is enforced in your game depends on what your table feels comfortable with. Is it mostly a social stigma? Will people whisper behind the character's back and see them as morally suspect? Is this a crime that the militia will be called on to enforce? Or is it best left to the village council or the Guardians of Decency? Whatever you choose, be careful and check in with your players. This touches on some dark and nasty modern trends that some people might wish to avoid in the game.

her face covered in a bloody veil, the sleeves and hems of her dress caked with dried blood, and wearing body parts as jewelry than to see her half-naked and covered in body paint. In fact, the anonymity that the veil can give has served many Axe Sisters well, allowing them an unseen entrance to many places where their tattoos and distinct appearance might have warned wrongdoers of their presence before they could strike.

YELMALIO'S VIEW

For some in the Yelmalio cult, this return to tradition has been celebrated as a great victory for their religious beliefs. In their view, this helps to spread public harmony, allowing men to unsee women in order not to be tempted by their wives. These men often have equally strict rules for their own behavior, such as never stepping on the earth with bare feet and following many other restrictive vows and geases. They see it as natural for the behavior of men and women to be restricted for the common good and veils as a good way to separate men and women at a glance.

For others, this is an unwelcome annoyance. While life in public might run smoother, things are tense in private. They do not like the implication that it's their duty to see to it that their wives and daughters behave properly, and they agree that while Yelmalio might ask for sacrifices of his followers, the followers of Ernalda should follow their own goddess decrees. They think that these new laws restrict men just as much; in fact, their traditional shawls have suddenly made them suspect of attempting to dress as a woman, which is scandalous.

An important thing to note is that there is no ban on women dressing as men or joining traditionally male cults. In fact, women in the Yelmalio cult are treated as men when it comes to cult obligations and dress. They do not need to wear a veil and are seen as taking their part in the shield wall rather than being protected behind it. Some women choose to wear the veil at times when they want to be seen as normal women; others never touch it, leaning into their martial aspect and authority.

FREEDOM IN OPPRESSION

Ironically, the prevalence of the veil has led to new opportunities for people who are not averse to breaking a few rules. One of the laws since the days of Varthanis Brighthelm has been that men are forbidden to dress as women, but behind the cover of a veil, men who prefer to present as women can now do so with comparative ease.

The veil also allows women to hide from public scrutiny, letting them conduct secret meetings or even extra-marital affairs with less chance of being spotted on the street. Dressing



However, it is important to understand that the social construct of class that a Western or Lunar philosopher would use to define the hierarchy of Sun County is not necessarily the same that the citizens would use to describe themselves as members of a group of people. If someone mentioned the concept of class to them, they'd scratch their heads and talk about unity and the shield wall. However, if one used words like townies, unfortunates, commoners, and patricians, or more derogatory terms, they'd know what kind of people are spoken of and where they fit in. While not as clearly defined as the membership of a clan would be, with its initiation rites and identifying markers, most people have a pretty good idea of their own social standing and that of others.

While the wisest among them would quietly agree that their society isn't as equal as it could or should be, most would not see the invisible barriers that keep the gold and even magic from flowing freely from those who have to those who don't.

Example: A Sun County shopkeeper would not use the term "underclass" or even unfortunates to describe a gang of thieves or rowdy herdsmen disturbing his business. In the heat of the moment, the shopkeeper would likely use a word like trash and lump them all together. However, in less pressing circumstances, he would be able to see a difference between them, from their professional function to the legality of their work. The thieves are skilled in taking things that don't belong to them, while herders are proficient in tending to animals. The former group commits illegal acts, while the only crime of the latter is being smelly.

It would not occur to most people that these two groups have more in common with each other than they would to a group of city potters, for example. This knowledge would be, at best, instinctive. A herder would perhaps understand a thief since only the lack of animals might separate them, but he would be hard-pressed to understand a priest since they share very little common ground.

Thus, while the concept of class incorporates everything from the division of labor, private ownership, education, social standing, and culture, it is, to most citizens of Sun County, an invisible divider that lacks a proper word to define it. It's all these things, but also none of them. Under the influence of the Lunar Empire, some scholars of Sun County started to use the concept of class as a tool to understand their own social dynamics better, but with the latest crackdown on everything Lunar, it has become a dangerous term to use even for academics.

Another complication is that few citizens of Sun County will admit these inequalities. While most will agree that there are differences between people, they attribute them to other factors, such as belonging to a family lineage or having the skills to perform a valuable function within

a fair and equal system. And in some ways, they are right; those things matter. This is why, for example, some professions span across several classes while some do not.

SOCIAL CLASS IN SUN COUNTY

The citizens of Sun County saw themselves as settlers of a new land, a civilized state. They left the old country behind, not just physically but, more importantly, when it came to old-fashioned notions like tribe and clan. As settlers, they imagined themselves as a single people standing united against their barbarian neighbors, the nomadic tribes of Prax. While it is true that the clan and tribe structures practiced in Sartar have no real meaning for them, the people of Sun County are divided by class.

Just as lineage can be likened to tribe, class can be likened to clan. A person's lineage matters when reciting ancestral lines, while class is what they live like every day of their life. Lineage and class are not synonymous concepts. They both follow strict hierarchies, but class is defined by factors that can adjust over time, while a person's lineage is what it is and never changes. In the class system, the patricians are on top, dominating every other class below it.

There are four social classes in Sun County: the **unfortunates**, the **commoners**, the **townies**, and finally, the **patricians**. The borders separating one class from another are not as clear-cut as the membership of a tribe or a clan; to many outsiders, it's a confusing concept. To muddy the waters further, class, as a means to define a person's importance through their function in society, is a politically loaded subject. The official and traditional stance is that all people in Sun County are equally important parts of the imagined shield wall against its enemies. So, while people use it as a social divider to describe their ambitions and importance, the official position is that no one class is better than the others, just different.

Even in a stable society, the subject of class-belonging is volatile and open to a constant cultural struggle of interpretation and re-interpretation. In a society with slight chances of upward mobility and few means of individual expression, the membership of a class becomes vital. Class-borders, the distinguishing markers between one class and the next, are fiercely fought over in the cultural arena. When a class feels threatened by another, it does what it can to distance itself from intruding groups. So, for example, when the unfortunates feel that they're not getting enough respect for their contribution to society as a whole or that someone from the townies is disrespecting them, they can exaggerate certain class definers to make an outsider feel ill at ease.

Example: A farmer might take off his shirt when a townie visits to drive home that he's not bothered by the social mores



of the latter and to show that his skin has been bronzed by many hours spent outside working beneath the gaze of Yelm.

A fisherman or herder, typical professions of the unfortunates, might pepper their language with colorful swear words and display outdoor manners that aren't accepted as polite by a farmer. They might use various means, such as exaggerating their tolerance for strange odors, as proof that their work is the hardest in Sun County and, therefore, their sacrifice for the common good is the greatest.

A patrician noble might want to distance herself from the encroaching new rich of the townies by engaging in scholarly discussions of history or entertainment to show that it's not by the power of gold alone one might be admitted into the halls of the powerful; it also takes refinement. Refinement is a subject that is always open to re-interpretation whenever a popular fad reaches the lower classes.

It is important to note that Sun County, while currently very conservative, has not always been as severely controlled as it is under the current Count. Indeed, Count Solanthos' rise to power proves Sun County has a degree of social mobility: Solanthos Ironpike is a bronze immigrant from the townie class. While social mobility has always been limited in Sun County due to the nature of its political, environmental, and socio-economic climate, ironically, the new rigid rules of the Count have created more change rather than less. For every politically suspect family that he banishes, another must rise to take its place.

Naturally, the foremost candidates for this rise will be recruited from Solanthos Ironpike's supporters within the highest possible social class, many of them from a similar bronze lineage. So, while the lives of the lower classes might change little, the current political life for townies and patricians is turbulent. This, in turn, leads to further opportunities for a wider range of change that might include people from all classes as they move into the gaps left by their betters. The resulting tension means that if Count Solanthos loses his grip on the Sun Dome, a new revolution or even a civil war might erupt. This would be for better and worse, as it is during great upheavals such as war and disasters when social mobility is at its greatest peak. It should also be noted that the ones who usually bear the heaviest and deadliest burden of such a social change are the lower classes.

COMMUNITY AND INDIVIDUALITY

Sun County is often compared to other civilized states such as Dara Happa and Esrolia, but the differences are immense. For all our words about the rigidity of Sun County's class system and its patriarchal structure, Sun County has several factors that make it stand out.

The first one is the geographical closeness of its people. Sun County lies in a small but fertile valley along the Zola Fel River. Statistically speaking, Sun County is not densely populated; however, its population is concentrated into settlement clusters around fertile areas. Much of the land is used for farming, a labor-intensive communal activity, meaning that people live and work closely together. At the same time, with its low population, there is plenty of space for settlements to spread. Sun County prides itself on having moved away from the cramped, barbaric, and unsanitary way of life that it sees as traditional for its neighbors. They disparage Sartar for their longhouses, where several families might live intimately under one roof, and the nomads of Prax for having no roof at all. To the citizens of Sun County, they have reached a nearly magical state of perfection that they call civilization, or in more common parlance: unity. Just enough, but not too much, and not too little either. Together, but separate. A foreigner wouldn't understand.

While people live close together in steads, farms, and towns, a family still has a private sphere and a private life that many other cultures lack. This domain of the personal has a huge influence on how citizens of Sun County see themselves and others. It plays a part in the justice system and how social mores are interpreted depending on whether a person is in a public or private place. There's a contradiction between the public life of the stoic, conservative citizen, oppressed by or serving the state's needs before their own, and the private life of the citizen that throws off her veil behind closed doors, curses the Count, and stuffs her pipe with hazia.

This way of life has made individuality a much more important factor than what is generally attributed to Sun County citizens. Consider the Orlanthi, who practice a fierce individuality grounded in a communal sense of unity. An Orlanthi takes pride in demonstrating their individuality and independence, as long as it's done within the understanding and acceptance of their tribe and the clan's approved methods of expression. Orlanth's rival, Yelmlio, is considered to be stuffy and rigid in comparison, and his followers are seen as valuing conformity over freedom. This is a common misunderstanding, and they are more alike at the core than they might like to admit despite expressing themselves in very different ways.

Just as Orlanthi performs acts of demonstrative individuality, Sun County citizens perform acts of demonstrative cohesion. It could, however, be argued that the average citizen of Sun County is just as, or perhaps even more so, focused on individuality as their rivals. Within the private sphere that some might say Orlanthi lacks, they are terribly outspoken. This private sphere is considered so integral to each citizen's life that it borders on being sanctified. This can be seen in the Justice chapter, as, for example, it's more offensive to rob a person's home, their private sphere, than to rob a citizen in the street.



The second thing that makes Sun County stand out is related to the first factor: the physical proximity of its citizens and how deeply rooted the feeling of solidarity is in popular identity. This is most likely the result of the social proximity of the differing classes and cults.

The two major cults in Sun County, Yelmlio and Ernalda, are so overwhelmingly popular that their influence overshadows any other. There are few citizens who aren't at least a lay member of one of them and don't have a family member or close friend who's a member of the other one. It's not surprising that a social consensus is prevalent in a society where most people are members of one of two cults that are, in turn, closely associated with each other. Yelmlio and his wife Ernalda help to ensure that all traditional heterosexual families live their lives in a mutual accord, not only publicly but also privately.

The social classes are often associated with their traditional geographical location. Patricians often live in towns or have had villages grow around their country villas. As the name suggests, townies stick to urban areas, while commoners live in rural areas and villages. The unfortunates live everywhere, from the urban districts of the poor to the marginal wilderness areas of Sun County. Thus, social classes can seem far apart, having dissimilar living conditions and living separately, but the reality is less clear-cut, and classes frequently intermix peacefully. True, the Sun Dome lies far from an isolated farmstead on the rim, but many farms are closely connected to the towns by other means than geographical considerations. Even the largest town in Sun County is surrounded by farmland, and they share the burden of harvest and taxation. The countryside and the urban population are dependent on each other. A village might be far out in the sticks, but it might be home to both crafters with proud but tempered townie manners, as well as unfortunates getting by doing odd jobs.

An important thing that brings people from various social classes together is the concept of cult service. Further, every able-bodied Yelmalian does their military service and spends two weeks serving in the militia every season. Farmers, herders, fishers, and even bandits might have, at one point in their lives, broken bread, bunked, trained, sweated, and co-operated with nobles and philosophers. Sun County is too small of a homeland for a single person to be unable to put a human face to another member of a different class. The only difference is, perhaps, the upper elite, as the priesthood and rulers are exempt from military duty since their service takes other forms.

Another example of unifying factors is the division of labor. When harvest time arrives, everyone is expected to take part. While it's easy to think that everyone excludes the local noble landholder, that is not the case. True, many of the upper crust might eschew the actual physical labor, focusing instead on administrative duties or leading the harvesting teams. But just as many pick up a sickle or a

pitchfork and put in the work, bending their backs just like everyone else.

Some nobles see it not just as a duty but as an opportunity to speak with their workers and struggle at their side to get to know them, understand their relationships, and hear their grievances. For a priest, scholar, or noble, this is an excellent time to sow harmony and mutual respect that will be repaid in full when the fruits of the soil are transformed into bread and drink that even the most powerful can't do without.

CLASS DEFINITIONS AND DIVIDERS

For the citizens of Sun County, the concept of class is synonymous with social standing, but it's also a group identity. It is where people find refuge and meaning. People from similar circumstances often share the same view of reality, problems, and opportunities in life. They value the same passions and experiences, and have similar social customs. The use of language within a class or group might also vary widely; the Heortling dialect of Sun County fractures further depending on who speaks. The language of the commoners is different from what is spoken by the townies. Their distinct pronunciation, disregard for traditional grammar, and the meaning they put on certain words and phrases can make it seem like a different language to the casual observer. Practically anything can be used as a class divider and as a shield against potential invaders of the social arena.

In this chapter, we limit ourselves to describing the most common things that define a class, but in later chapters on architecture, clothes, and food, we have tried to give practical examples of how this influences society.

We have used a common formula to describe the classes of Sun County.

NAME

First, we give the class a name. For example, a Sun County official or philosopher would use that name to write a report or a tract. Underneath the name, in italics, we list various examples of how the citizens of Sun County might refer to the same class, depending on their own prejudices, good or bad.

LIFE CONDITIONS

Life Conditions is a quick summary of how the everyday events of the typical representative of a social class shape their experience. Of course, a "typical" representation of a class does not exist. It is purely an academic fabrication created to be able to say anything useful about what it is like to belong to one class or the other. Life is a highly



complex affair, a series of contrasting hurdles that a being must traverse, and one person's experiences might be fundamentally different from their neighbor's, whether they're of the same class or not. A person's gender, cult affiliation, sexuality, or childhood experiences might have had a bigger influence on their identity than their class belonging. When the information provided in the Life Conditions section is contradictory, it should be read with this in mind.

In short, Life Conditions are representative examples of how people live, how their lives are affected by others, and what they do to manage other people's expectations of these conditions. They are not hard facts that apply to everyone. For example, they should not be read literally but instead, give the player and the gamemaster an idea from which to elaborate.

LIVING STANDARD

Living Standard is a concept taken from the *RuneQuest* main rule book and shows the different material standards of people's lives. Despite the outward attempts at equality, money is a very real factor in Sun County life. It affects such major issues as being able to eat a meal every day or protect yourself from the environment.

Note that the living standard listed for a character's class isn't meant to supersede that of their Profession. It should be seen as a baseline that can go up or down according to the whims of fate. An important consideration is that a person might have fallen on hard times, financially speaking, but might still consider themselves and be seen by others as part of a higher class than one might expect from the state of their clothing, home, or food supply.

GM note: As will be seen on page 226 in the Character Creation chapter, some professions might come with differing living standards when compared to what is written in the RuneQuest: Glorantha main rule book. For example, a Warrior from the commoner class will have the Free living standard as normal, while a Warrior from the Patrician class will probably have the Noble living standard. As the income generated from the profession does not change, the extra money needed to keep up appearances will have to come from the family coffers.

PROFESSION

Profession is not as clear a class divider as it might seem. Many professions cross class boundaries. This is due to a person's position within those professions and a reminder that even though your function in society might be defined by your skill set, Sun County is just as unfair as the rest of

Glorantha. In many cases a person's other traits might be seen as more important than what they do for a living.

In addition, only so many official positions are available for townies and patricians to practice their chosen profession. It is not uncommon that people of a higher social standing have to accept a profession that might be beneath them. Pride being what it is, the social status of a profession is more fluid than a person's social standing. A patrician serving as a Warrior, a profession typically practiced by commoners, will still be considered a patrician as long as they define themselves as such and follow the traditions of their peers. In other words, class can sometimes be a question of not what you do but who you manage to present yourself as.

If, for example, a great fad of fishing came upon Sun County, it would not be uncommon to see a patrician or townie choose Fisher as a profession. However, it would take quite a bit of effort for that same person to be accepted as belonging to the unfortunates, even if they tried. The choice could be lauded by their peers as an eccentric bold move, but it would do little to improve the status or living standard of the average Fisher.

EDUCATION

From a game technical point of view, education is covered by the Profession-system's skillset in the main rulebook. For this chapter, it's instead used as a term to define which classes value which types of skills and how they use them differently. The ability to read, write, and speak exotic languages is normally more prevalent among townies and patricians.

While some lores, communication, and other skills might be well known among several classes, their use could differ. A Bandit might be more proficient in animal or plant lore than a Philosopher, but their usage of the skill, the words they would use in describing and framing this knowledge, would be very different.

LINGUISTICS

Linguistics is not about the Speak Own Language skill, which is covered under skills, as normal. Here, we discuss the social usage of language. A Farmer might have as high a command of Heortling as a Philosopher, but the skill level doesn't mean they will use the same words as the Philosopher does while discussing an issue.

A well-spoken townie, for example, can masquerade themselves, more or less convincingly, by the manner in which they talk. The role and function of language varies depending on class. What could be a perfectly reasonable language usage, even a social lubricant, in one class could be a deadly insult in another. The subject discussed also matters, as silence or omission of certain things says as

much about people as vocal and outspoken use might about others.

The meat of this section is taken up explaining popular idioms. These are not always tied to a particular class; some inevitably get picked up and distorted by other classes.

CUSTOMS

Instead of repeating the social mores and customs of Sun County as a whole (which were dealt with in the *Common Customs* chapter on page 20 above), we have decided to focus on where it differs between classes and the cultural norm. Just as one tribe or clan in Sartar might put a high value on some deeds while considering others borderline criminal, Sun County's classes are separated by what is socially acceptable.

Speaking of, we haven't included common criminal acts in these mores, as they are covered in the *Law and Order* chapter on page 87. When a certain behavior is considered as bad as a criminal act by one group and not others, we have tried to make a note of it.

We've done our utmost not to demonize or justify one class over the others, and in those cases where we have failed, we can only apologize. Any attempt at describing complex customs will always have to make use of blunt tools, and while we have tried to invoke a sense of levity, it shouldn't be interpreted as ridicule. All descriptions here are meant to be general, and as always, the individual experience trumps any generalization on our part. Your Glorantha May Vary.



THE UNFORTUNATES

Beast-wrangler, Sartarite, Barbarian, Roofless, Rabble, Savage, Homeless, Nomad, Rider, Trash, Hard Man/Woman, Bronzeback, Mudkipper, Layabout, Stickpicker, Tentsitter.

LIFE CONDITIONS

Life is hard; get used to it.

The origins of the unfortunates are varied. Some can trace their lineage back quite far, perhaps being serfs or servants of the so-called golden settlers, an epithet they carry with either dignity or in an ironic manner. Others belong to the river people who lived on the shores of Zola Fel before the first settlers arrived and have no wish to move elsewhere. Yet others might be bronze immigrants, and some might be so recent that there's been no other name for them than the culture from which they originate, hence the many derogatory popular words for them. While most are citizens, others might still be, feel, or call themselves Sartarite or Praxian, turning the insult on its head. Some are not legally speaking citizens; that is, they haven't been formally acknowledged as such. See the chapter about *Tolerated Foreigners* on page 67 for more details.

When hunger or war hits the Praxian tribes, it's not uncommon for the occasional outcast or refugee to enter Sun County and work as a herder on a seasonal basis. The same goes for ground men, nomad slaves, who have managed to escape. With how curtailed the nomad presence is in Sun County, it's a good place to lay low and recover before trying to make tracks elsewhere. The illegal foreigner's lot is the hardest since they can't count on any of the rights a citizen has and are left to survive on their own devices or rely on family members who are already established. As some have yet managed or wanted to rid themselves of their former tribe and clan affiliations, there is often strife between different groups within the unfortunates, and the flames might be fanned by outside parties that can benefit from keeping them as divided as possible.

A Struggle for Survival

Life is hard for the unfortunates and a constant struggle for survival. They have limited access to resources others take for granted, like money, security, clean water, warmth, shelter, food, healers, political and social power, and education. Every day is an effort to make ends meet. This unceasing dearth of everything from material goods to the hope that things will improve for their children profoundly affects the individual. They are forced to develop survival



strategies at an early age and the will to keep fighting instead of succumbing to despair.

These survival strategies can strengthen a person, which has earned the unfortunates the epithet of being hard men and women. However, what is strength in some situations can just as easily be debilitating in others. A loving parent might feel the need to toughen up their children and teach them painful survival strategies that other children might be spared from. Or, in the worst of cases, a parent might have succumbed to despair already, and their own survival strategy might be to vent their anger on those who can't defend themselves.

For the unfortunate, anything can be a threat. The weather, wild animals, roaming disease spirits, and other people. This includes people bearing gifts and promises of better times. To the unfortunates, even a gift freely given comes with a heavy price they will never be able to pay back. No matter how well meant, a promise might make a survivor lose vital focus when needed, and hope could prove lethal. This constant vigil often manifests itself in various physical and mental health issues, scars that better-off people are spared from. Outsiders often interpret these wounds as hardness, a lack of interest or empathy, or an unwillingness to change.

Outside Community

When met with this stubborn, stoic pride and suspicious nature, one must consider that there is little gain by investing themselves in communal activities for the unfortunates. Many are landless, belong to the wrong cults, and may not even be considered proper citizens of Sun County. If they do have access to a plot of land, it's often marginal grazing land, nothing that would need the close cooperation that the communal irrigation systems require of the average farmer. Their own activities, such as banding up to protect their grazing rights, to acts of desperation such as stealing, robbing, or trafficking in *hazia*, are nearly always met with such hostility and violence from other groups that they invariably fail.

A small gang of hostile hoodlums from the unfortunates might seem frightening when encountered on their turf, but on the whole, their actions are as extreme as they are fruitless. What might bring food on the table one day will bring swift, hard, and uncompromising justice the next. What feels good now will hurt tomorrow. They don't speak openly about these things with outsiders, but they are not stupid. They might lack the education to define their predicament in scholarly terms, but on some level, they are all aware of the reality of it. This awareness fuels their rage and urges them to commit actions that might harm them in the future. It feeds a perpetual cycle that they feel trapped within. The Stasis Rune isn't their friend, but neither is the Movement Rune.

Much is said about the lack of ambition among the unfortunates, as well as their stubborn unwillingness to contribute to the greater good. These characteristics are often attributed to laziness, ignorance, and short-sightedness. However, from their perspective, communal activity prescribed from above, such as participating in farming or defending a village in case of an attack, are seen as intrusions on what little freedom they have left. Such activities are, to them, nothing but a waste of time with potentially dangerous consequences that are unlikely to bring them much benefit. Even if participating in a war or contributing to the harvest might help them in the long term, talk of standing united in a shield wall is met with understandable cynicism. Why should they fight, work, and perhaps even die for others when the people with the most to gain wouldn't lift a finger to help them in return? Anything that drains their energy or time is considered a useless distraction that might put them in even more dire circumstances. To them, lofty ideals are not only an illusion but potentially harmful.

This might be seen as an argument that the typical unfortunate citizen is completely uninterested in nurturing or pursuing spiritual powers, taking part in cult religion, entertainment, or taking pleasure from beauty and culture. Nothing could be further from the truth. The unfortunates have the same needs as everyone else; indeed, it could be said that they seek it with even greater fervor. What others might consider cult duty, spiritual satisfaction from communing with gods and ancestors, or leisure activity might instead be coping mechanisms. Strategies for survival are taken with a seriousness of intent that the unfortunates feel is lacking in their betters. Religious fervor can be profound, and much energy and thought is spent on communal activities such as holidays and feasts.

Life is Violent

The unfortunates are often seen through a hostile lens by every other class. They are an example that defines the borders of acceptable behavior. Even commoners, their closest social neighbors, see them as uneducated, dumb, uncultured, rude, smelly, violent, insane, illogical, argumentative, and just plain contrarian. They have little to lose from physical confrontation or a bad reputation because their status is already at rock bottom. Violence is seen as useful, not only as a way to resolve a conflict but also as a means to let off steam. To others, it might seem strange to see two people engage in a violent fistfight and then share a drink and have a laugh about it later, as if nothing had happened. It might be bewildering to hear a mother curse out her children as if she hates them when all she does is express her fear and worry for the well-being of her loved ones.



Stoicism by Necessity

The separation between genders is less overt than anywhere else in Sun County. With the high mortality and poor living conditions, people of any gender and age have to be able to step up during an emergency. And emergencies are many. Children work at an earlier age and often learn by taking part rather than being taught or observing at their leisure. This leads to a certain pride in being able to handle themselves, whatever the situation might be. There's a stoicism to the suffering, which is prevalent in culture and language. You're not meant to complain unless there is an obvious cause. The cause is up to much debate during times of leisure, where adults discuss hypothetical scenarios or right and wrong, taken either from their own experiences or from Cult or Homeland Lore.

There is little social mobility for the unfortunates. The only way to sink deeper is to die or to become a hunted outlaw, and as for moving upwards, there are few opportunities. One is making a career out of their military service, which can also be a path to joining the Yelmario cult and eventual citizenship for outsiders. However, this comes with a high price tag. To an independent man who takes pride in being tough and hard to handle, the conformist nature of the Sun County militia might not be to his benefit. For women, it could be a way to get out from under the yoke, but it would mean going against cult traditions. It's more common to see people from the unfortunates join up with disreputable mercenary bands than manage to make a career out of sanctioned soldiery. But it does happen and can lead to a better life for the family of the enlisted son or daughter.

Fatalism and extreme viewpoints are common. The hard nature of life is something you either accept or challenge head-on. This can be seen in how a relatively minor situation can quickly boil over, but also how fast it can be repaired if people have, despite all appearances, managed to stay relatively calm.

Friends and Family

The unfortunates have their own behavior codes, and signs of loyalty can be bold and dramatic. You're a friend for life or an enemy until death. To the outsider, reactions can seem disproportionate to what actually happened, and many think that the homeless, the roofless, and the trash have much in common with the nomads of Prax and the violent Orlanthe. No one understands them either.

Family is important, as it can be a means of support where no other support exists, but they are not as dogmatic about it as some other classes. They rarely feel bound to stay trapped in relationships that aren't working. They are likely to be outspoken about troubles and make abrupt departures if they feel dissatisfied or disrespected. Feuding isn't unknown between families; neither is feuding inside

them, between siblings and generations. Feuds can become long, bitter, and violent since Sun County justice isn't too concerned with punishing criminal acts when neither the perpetrator nor the victim is seen as reputable.

The unfortunates usually forge bonds with great care and seriousness, as bonds and oaths can carry certainty and uncertainty with them, depending on the person you're bound to. It's often said that loyalty among hard men enemies is stronger than between townie friends.

Within your Means

The unfortunates are often described as ugly by outsiders, and while their appearance is no different from anyone else's, they are indeed worn down at a rapid pace. The lack of money for proper healers makes old wounds linger or mend wrong. The hard life also makes for a shorter life span, and people often look older than they are. What is often taken for a ferocious look among their children comes from growing up and shouldering adult burdens too soon. There is little time for leisure, and it has to be cheap. Death is ever-present.

What little means they have to beautify themselves and their homes, they use creatively with skill and care. Other classes rarely see their dedication to keeping their house, if not whole, then at least clean or dressing properly, even if they lack water to bathe daily or mend their clothes. The unfortunates know there's a cost to everything, if not in gold, then in effort and time. If they lack funds to organize events, they won't hesitate to gatecrash proceedings that are theoretically open to anyone. This is done with a zeal interpreted by others as crass behavior or pure arrogance, but it is really a mental shield put in place because they are well aware they do not fit in. Often, they keep to themselves, but the bolder among them won't hesitate to force their betters to acknowledge their unwelcome and disturbing presence.

EDUCATION

There are few opportunities for formal education open to the unfortunates. Knowledge is acquired by practice or by inheritance and is, therefore, very valuable. Learned men are respected, but to assert the value of their own way of life, the respect is often accompanied by a light-hearted comment about scroll-taught wisdom that might sound harsher than meant. The few people with formal education have often acquired it through military conscription or exceptional circumstances of a turbulent life.

Despite common prejudice, languages and communication skills are held in high regard. While physical skills are useful for day-to-day survival, they are often taken for granted. To truly stand out, one must know how to assert oneself. Fast Talk and Orate, as well as Insight,

are not only used to convince other people to do something, but they are also a means to communicate worth, values, and a sense of humor.

Many of the unfortunates speak both common and uncommon languages but almost never read and write. An individual might have to travel a lot to find work, or their occupation might occur outdoors and over a large area, where they meet people speaking different languages. Some are good at communicating in many tongues, while others have great knowledge of just one, which they often command to a surprising and disconcerting level of sophistication for an outsider who may have expected something completely different.

The most common foreign languages spoken are Boatspeech, for people making their way on the river, Tradetalk for people making their living as porters and laborers; and Praxian, for immigrants or people living near the rim.

LINGUISTICS

One can't underestimate the language barrier for outsiders when it comes to the language of the unfortunates. The classic Heortling Sun County dialect is peppered with Praxian expressions to an extent that might confuse people from the outside. Indeed, many new arrivals speak mainly Praxian with some Heortling peppered in.

“Wouldn't it suit y'all better if we juz lay down to die?”

This can be an insult, a statement, an honest query, or a heartfelt injective. It is just as likely to be used against an authority figure as after having hit one's thumb with a hammer.

“Ye cry about the smell, but ye need the dung to live.”

Many professions among the unfortunates handle animals, and some smell notoriously bad. They rarely own several pairs of clothes. Access to water might be limited. Buckets of water might often be carried for long distances, divided between several people, and used for food preparation and drinking before, at last, it is used for washing and bathing.

“What's up?” or “Whazzap, Bro”

These two are the most common greetings among the unfortunate; it's a shortened version of “Dome above, Brother,” the expected

response is either “Yelmalio,” “The Dome,” or “Dome,” or just the same phrase repeated back among close friends.

“Blood isn't water.” / “Blood dries.”

The first statement is to display a person's belief in family solidarity. The other is a typical response of disagreement, that there is a limit to one's patience.

“Go ** yourself, you inbred, lazy-**** son of a **** ****ing **** and **** the zebra **** you ****ing rode in on, you sorry-*** zebra-****er.”**

The unfortunates, whether men or women, are experts in using four-letter words. They make up new ones as they go along and combine them into new, fresh, often humorous combinations full of color and poetry.

“Worn clothes, clean face.”

This means that you do the best you can, and that's good enough.

“It's better to take than to be gifted. Debts are paid one way or the other.”

These two sentences are meant as a proverb that is either told together in its entirety or as a call and response. Sometimes, they are used separately, as the other part is implied. They can be interpreted two ways and are no doubt meant as an excuse for bad but necessary evil, and as a moral incitement to do as much good as possible.

Example: Vartar and Korem, two hard men, walk by an unguarded cart when they spot several bags of flour. Stealing is wrong, but their families are hungry.

Vartar looks at the cart.

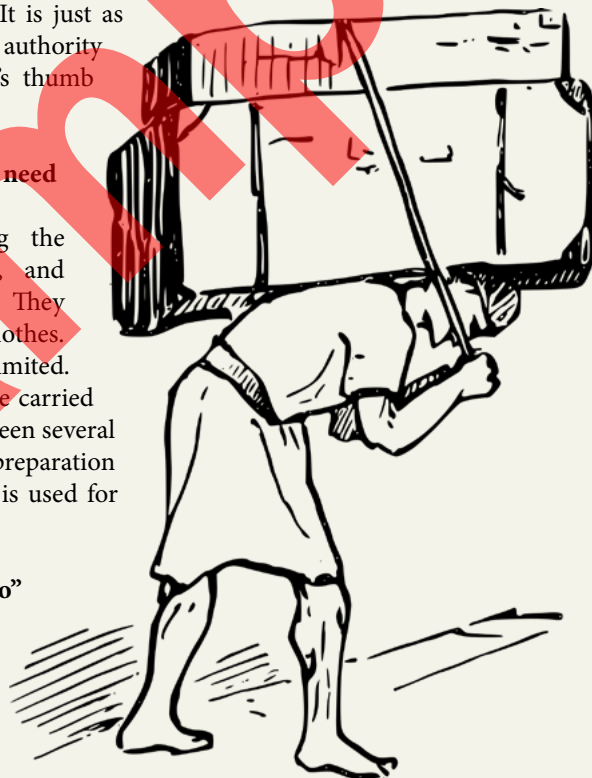
“It's better to take than to be gifted,” he sighs.

“True that,” says Korem and steals a bag.

Neither of them wants to say the second sentence out loud; they know it by heart, and it would be a bad omen.

Example: Ulkar has lost his hammer. Tyko offers him his own, but Ulkar refuses out of pride.

“Debts are paid one way or the other,” says Tyko, forcing the hammer into his hand. Ulkar feels obligated to take it since Tyko refers to a debt that, most likely, is unrelated to Ulkar.





Legend has it that “one way or the other” were the last words of Brug the Terrible before he was hacked into forty-six pieces by the Babeester Gor Lady of Vengeance Ula Beautiful-Wound. They are considered a testament to his unrepentant and truly hard nature, seen as both horrific and respectable at the same time. An example of how even the best sayings can be corrupted by bad men doing bad things.

Nearly every saying can be used in a wide variety of situations where the same intent would be appropriate. Sarcastic use is frequent, and it’s often hard for an outsider to understand in which manner it was meant.

CUSTOMS

Lack of Shame

Body noises and functions can be done in public if needed. This isn’t due to a lack of impropriety, as Count Solanthos asserts, but rather from having little other choice and trying their best to assert pride in an undignified situation. Private life is a premium among people who spend more time outdoors than inside privately owned dwellings. Rude behavior done callously is also considered part of being hard and ready for anything. The saying “****-naked, with a dagger*” is a reference to the infamous thief Ygon Clingfinger, who was hanged in 1603, about whom it was said he never went to do his business without being ready for company.

Hospitality and Pride

While they rarely have much to share, a guest will have just as much as any household member when visiting. The unfortunates have a great sense of hospitality, and rude behavior that would otherwise be acceptable is toned down when having guests.

It’s often bewildering to outsiders that a person who’s, for example, dirty and smelly can put great pride in their hat. Or have spent hours polishing their shoes when all the other clothes barely hang together. To the unfortunates it’s a question of doing what one can with what one’s got. This idea might seem proof of half-heartedness, lack of care, or inconsistency, but it is a sign of maintaining pride wherever it can be found.

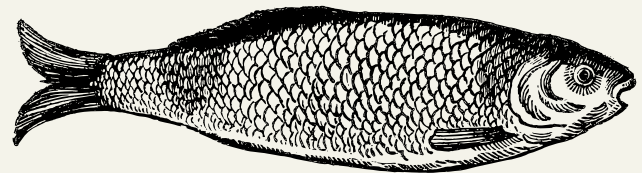
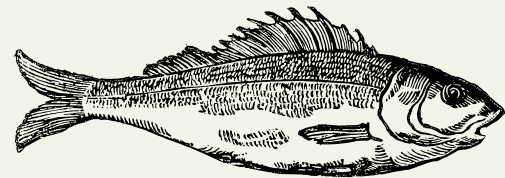
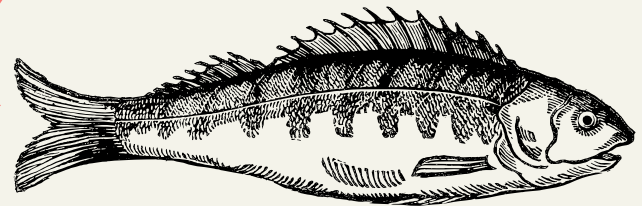
They are aware of how they are perceived, but by pretending not to be and being rude to authority, they assert a modicum of power over an uncomfortable situation. In a group or alone, one can often count on an individual doing their best to be as insolent as possible towards people who seem like they look down upon them. They wouldn’t phrase it as such, but to them, it’s a matter of kicking back when kicked.

Words are Actions

The hard people are fond of challenging people to tests of courage and character in a brusque and straightforward manner, even to people they’ve just met. It’s often a performative act, but it does have a certain value to the individual or the group they represent. Can this stranger take a joke, be trusted, and be dependable? Such questions are important to an individual for whom life is a fight.

Words and actions are not as separated from each other, as they often are among the mostly soft-spoken or silent commoners. On the contrary, the unfortunates are mouthy and loud, which can escalate to physical confrontation. Among them, little distinction is made between social or verbal violence and physical violence. A person can lead with verbal violence and be met by the other without having anyone but themselves to blame. While words are often harsh, the intent matters. Did the person throw an insult or a punch as a means to hurt or injure the other, or was it perhaps a poor choice of words, an accident, or a joke? It is common among the unfortunates to ask, “was that supposed to hurt?” before retaliating.

Oaths are few, but they are taken with great seriousness and are considered just as binding if they were taken in private as in front of a slew of witnesses. It’s better to take than to be gifted, after all. The Babeester Gor are popular, and their actions are rarely questioned. Wronged women, or those considered especially ‘hard,’ are sometimes lay members of her cult. When these women start swearing her name, sober men shut up and go for a walk.



THE COMMONERS

Dullard, Toiler, Commoner, Farmer, Labourer, Dirt-thumb, Quiet One, Sweatback, Solid, Regular, Shield-Bearer.

LIFE CONDITIONS

Life is hard, but it can be good as well.

For the commoners of Sun County, farming dictates their way of life. It determines the rhythm of the year and gives a source of security, not just for their families but for the entirety of Sun County. Without farming, the specialists of society, like crafters, scholars, and leaders, wouldn't be able to focus their energies on producing the high standards of craft and lore that Sun County prides itself on. The Sun County military might and range of operations rests on the farmer's work. Without a reliable supply of food that's easy to store and stockpile, it would be impossible to maintain the well-trained militia and templars in the field. The people toiling in the fields are well aware of this, and while they rarely feel that they are appreciated enough, they take great pride in being the strong back of the greatest place to live in Glorantha, Sun County.

This pride and certainty of their importance can often blind them to what is happening around them. Often, it's said that commoners are good at unseeing anything that isn't directly related to their own business, and most farmers would reply that the assumption is "fair enough."

The commoners are fervent practitioners of the stoic, self-disciplined lifestyle that is the spine of Yelmalian philosophy. To them, the teaching of the cult goes hand in hand with the regulated life of the farmer. To most, it's hard to separate the necessities of work from cult duties or customs as they are interwoven to the point of being essentially the same.

Gendered Reality

The schism between the genders is at its greatest among the commoners. The division of labor is often segregated, and the roles are rigid. The cultural stereotype of men in the military traditions of the Yelmalian cult means they are expected to have disciplined tongues, to be direct and clear in their words, and to be quiet when there's nothing to be said. However, women are expected to behave like Ernalda, sensuous, conservative, nurturing, and good with words that can soothe men and rough off the sharp edges of their social behavior. These are just stereotypes, and there are as many examples of people behaving in a way that confirms them as there are exceptions to the norm. That being said, commoners are self-conscious of the cultural stereotypes, perhaps to a greater extent than many other classes, and use

them frequently to explain, support, or chastise themselves and others for their actions. They are aware, at least in public, that these stereotypes are fantasies and expectations that have little to do with everyday reality, but at the same time, they don't hesitate to resort to them when they need to.

To understand commoners, one must remember that most farmers also serve as part-time soldiers in a highly disciplined and authoritarian organization. Most women haven't done military service, and while this makes their frame of reference different from men, this great discrepancy also gives women a certain social freedom. They are unbound by the Honor Passion, and while they often respect men's adherence to it, they are at liberty to act in ways that men can't. They are free to ridicule, ignore, and question the military values unimportant to their daily routines. They can devise unorthodox solutions that a man would be hesitant to express. While many townies and patricians maintain that commoners and unfortunates are ignorant, no one sells them short on their craftiness. They are adept at using the accepted stereotypes, gender roles, and values to their advantage when needed.

Public and Private

Public and private spheres are less clearly defined among commoners. Though inside and outside of one's home are respected as separate domains, people of the same village or stead are often free to enter another family's private sphere with a short, loud word or a knock on the door frame as a warning. A commoner wouldn't wait for a reply before barging in; the warning is just a courtesy. This custom would shock a townie and most likely lead to a fight with one of the unfortunates. Both would see it as very rude behavior. A patrician might consider the lack of manners borderline criminal behavior or laugh it off as picturesque.

This custom comes from practical considerations. The highly organized and collective nature of labor among the commoners means that it's important to be available at all times for supplementary work or consultation as the situation needs. The boundaries of the private home are respected after dark when there's no sign of light inside. It would take an emergency for a commoner to bother his neighbor at such a time.

This has led to the belief among other classes that commoners are either rudely forthcoming as they don't respect boundaries or overtly timid to bother others needlessly and too careful about expressing an opinion. While there is some truth to these assumptions of the character of the everyday man or woman, neither is completely correct.

Even though commoners are prone to barge unexpectedly into each other's homes, there is also an unsaid understanding between Yelmalian of not seeing what could be potentially damaging to others. Not



everyone respects this understanding; Ernaldan cultists have no means or obligation to unsee anything. They will gossip as they see fit about what they have seen or heard. Men see this as rude, careless, and dangerous, but women frame it differently. To them, considering that men are unwilling to talk about problems, gossip is essential for the well-being of a community. Using subterfuge to deliver a private matter into the public sphere might be the only way to bring harmony to the stead or village.

This is a frequent source of arguments between men and women and is seen as a great divider between the sexes. However, as with any generalization, the reality can be quite different. Many women are better than men at holding their tongues, and quite a few men gossip frequently but often in a round-about manner that seems less offensive to them. Instead of calling their interchange of sensitive personal information for gossip, they refer to it as having “a talk between men” or a “man-to-man.” This phrase sounds much better to their ears, as it has strong martial associations that women couldn’t possibly understand.

Commoners can be direct and loud in their opinions. Still, they also pay close attention to consensus and are as good at determining the social climate before they speak as they are at reading the weather before planting. To everyone, work is the most important aspect of life, a near-sacred task, and everything that disrupts it should be avoided. A stoic man will not upset the shield wall to voice a minor grievance.

A Farmer’s Lot

While the commoners are often seen as ignorant people doing uncomplicated physical labor, this is selling them short. The Sky Rune is part of their life, and craftiness is a valued talent. Other classes conveniently forget that farming isn’t just hard physical work but also requires patience, organization, and knowledge. Commoners know they are seen as less knowledgeable, but to the crafty, such prejudices could also be advantageous when dealing with higher authorities. Especially come tax time.

While their life is framed by duties and work, and their lifestyle is seen as monotonous, the actual obligations are pleasantly varied for most of the year. While the barley grows, there is plenty of time for other activities that offer more variation to their existence than to the townie class, for example. While the latter works all year, doing more or less the same tasks, the commoners have clearly defined boundaries between work and leisure that no one can question.

The commoners define themselves by who they are and by whom they are not. They are the majority of the Sun County citizenry, while the others are the minorities. They are free, working the land according to its rhythm, while others are bound by the incessant demands of profit

and authority. They make up the greatest part of the shield wall, while the others are protected by it. They are stoic and implacable, just like nature itself, while others are subject to the whims of politics and fate. Commoners can be hard to argue with, and it’s easy to envy them for their strong sense of identity and purpose.

While it is true that the rest of the country lives off the work of the commoners and that their labor is exploited, the average farmer wouldn’t necessarily think that’s bad. As long as their work is respected and appreciated, they are content with being the shield wall. One could also argue that they are on one of the lower steps of the hierarchy in an autocratic nation and, as such, have very little agency of their own. Again, a farmer might disagree. They see townies and unfortunates as the ones to truly pity. The only time a commoner comes in contact with absolute authority is when taxes must be paid. The local nobles are often aware of how dependent they are on the goodwill of their farmers. A wise Noble will try to be highly visible, involved and at their best manners towards their inferiors during harvest.

With the yearly allocation of lot land, further explained in the *Land Use and Ownership* chapter on page 116, the quality of the land a farmer is assigned can vary. However, even bad soil can give a good harvest with a judicious application of Ernaldan farming magics, and even the best soil can fail if the farmer doesn’t do their job. Many see the Sacred Time lottery as the gods telling them how hard they are expected to work in the coming year. The living standard of a farmer, however, is more tied to the location of the village itself than the individual. Villages along the rim mostly consist of poor farmers, while the ones in the middle of the barley belt enjoy a better living standard. Thus, they share their lot with their fellow village members.

Resolving Arguments

Fairness and rationality are valued by commoners. Farmers are great proponents of consensus to reach a compromise that benefits as many as possible. The importance of The Lot of the Land system, as a fair but random manner to decide who works where, cannot be overstated. Many scholars ask why fairness and consensus are so highly valued among the commoners, and one reason might just be the very nature of farming.

During seasons when there’s a great need for communal work, everyone has to pitch in to the best of their abilities, or the harvest will fail. These are the hard weeks when work is plenty, and life can seem tough and demanding. These weeks are also when the village council or the family head has real authority over the life of the common man or woman. A lot of social pressure is put upon the commoners unwilling to do their part.

If social pressure doesn’t help, the council, through the militia, will make a judgment for restitution. The



commoners have their own unofficial justice system, and flagrant customs breaches can be solved in the fields after dark or during a festival when there are plenty of liquid excuses to blame the violence upon. Not doing one's part is commonly accepted as having it coming, as far as physical violence goes. Most other disputes are supposed to be handled verbally. While violence might be resorted to, the militia is at hand to be called in as arbitrators and ensure a solution is found before going that far. During Fire Season, when the weather is hot, tempers are volatile, and fights are more common.

However, violence still isn't considered a socially acceptable manner to resolve arguments. Most arguments are settled by reason in favor of the side that proves to be the most rational. Rationality is seen as doing the most good for the most people, with the least inconvenience for those who aren't involved in the argument.

If a problem concerns everyone in the stead or village, the "inconvenienced neighbor" is identified as the closest other settlement, the tax district, or even Sun County as a whole. Judging whether a resolution of a problem will inconvenience such high actors as Sun County institutions will naturally demand a certain knowledge of political affairs. A knowledge that commoners aren't supposed to have, according to some. There is a notion among outsiders that the commoners aren't interested in anything but what happens on their farms and hides. This is to underestimate their abilities to judge the political climate and their involvement in what goes on outside their own settlement.

To the commoners, it's vital that they understand what goes on around them, or they'd lose the freedom to settle these matters among themselves. They would have to involve others for advice and thus cause an inconvenience. A shield wall should be able to resolve these matters without disrupting the wall's integrity. There is, of course, a sense of self-service in this argument in that an unresolved argument could seriously disrupt work. From experience, commoners have learned that it's better to invest time during periods of low-intensity labor to update themselves on all affairs that might affect their harvest rather than stand unprepared when a problem grows too large for them to handle. The village councils usually consist of commoners known for being crafty and knowledgeable and who have a lot of experience dealing with socio-political relations, not just within the community but with the rest of Sun County. The typical commoner might not have much energy to look to the past or the future when labor demands are at their peak. Instead, they spend their time talking around the hearth during the calmer seasons to prepare for what might come.

The concept of fairness has a strange role in arguments, as it is entirely up to consensus to determine what is fair and what isn't. A good debate tactic in an argument can be for one person to assume more responsibility and work

than their opponent to show their fidelity to the common good. This can sometimes lead to competition among the actors, where both parties take on unreasonable amounts of work to prove a point. This could lead to exhaustion and a lack of manpower when it's vitally needed. It's then up to arbitrators, such as the town council, to calm the situation and appeal to reason instead of hot-blooded, crazed stoicism.

Degrees of Loyalty

In contrast to the image of the quiet commoner, the debates over subjects that affect their daily lives can go on for hours. To the outsider, it might seem strange that they spend so much time arguing about the soil capacity of one hide of land over the other, or which is the best and fairest way to weigh produce, when they can stoically accept a command from a higher authority to take part in a military exercise that disrupts their work. It suggests a docile nature, which would be a false assumption. Commoners are highly pragmatic. They have a strong affinity to the Sky and Earth Runes and believe there's little point in arguing about things out of their hands.

They might grumble and curse the vagaries of fate and politics but generally hold the whims of authority as something as inevitable as the weather. In private, the view of political decisions can be one of contempt for bad decisions and bad rulers. However, such large, sweeping problems unrelated to their livelihood aren't for them to protest openly. Not when there are many other immediate concerns, such as establishing a consensus with the neighboring community about a communal drainage ditch system, for example. Apart from the most ambitious among them, they generally feel that all other classes are "outsiders" and that what they are up to isn't worth the hassle. They see authority closely connected with the act, not the word or title. If a patrician knows what he is talking about regarding agriculture or is good at pitching in, then he's a good one, even if he has strange or lofty ideas and weird manners.

Keeping up with one's obligations to society by performing the Yelmalian cult duty of military service is a major part of living up to one's duties as a man and citizen. It assumes a loyalty not only to Sun County as a whole but to one's class, especially. Loyalty as a concept is a serious business for a commoner, no matter the gender. Women demonstrate loyalty and value it just as highly as men do, but in a different manner. To a woman, loyalty is shown and acted out by participating in communal activities, such as Ernalda rites, or by showing solidarity with other women and families and supporting one's home, stead, village, and Sun County. Women are often driving forces in good relationships between communities and usually know many more people than their husbands or sons do. Many are the men who have one day been surprised by how many



people show up to pitch in during an emergency. People who curiously are strangers to him but not to his wife, sisters, or mother. This cherished female ability to talk and get along, even with people the man might consider hostile, is vital to the family. Wise men often tell newlyweds that a woman might need her husband's protection but doesn't need a herder. If she isn't allowed to come and go as she pleases, you will find yourself alone in the end. Solitude, in this case, doesn't only refer to the woman leaving the man but the man isolating himself from others. From the female perspective, it's another reason among many why it's vital that women gossip.

In public, loyalty is often displayed with body language and other non-verbal means rather than words. Expressing one's loyalty in a socially acceptable manner is a question of taste. Being loud can be an asset when orating or debating, but when expressing loyalty, it's better to be soft-spoken and unassuming. Generally speaking, the act is more prized than the word among commoners who are used to hard work. They define themselves not as talkers but as doers. Loyalty is rarely expressed in private without an obvious act or word in public that supports it.

To a commoner, a sign of loyalty could be expressed by repairing a friend's tool or helping take care of their children when they see the need, whether asked to or not. Not offering aid before giving it strongly indicates that the two commoners have an intimate and strong relationship. Among both men and women, the less two people feel the need to talk about important things, such as the division of labor, the more harmonious their connection is.

Idealizing Work and Duty.

To commoners, hard work and inconveniences are what make a person great. This is a bit hypocritical, as other classes also work hard. Pressured, the commoner would acknowledge this, but the romantic ideal of the suffering, stoic shield-bearer, or strong woman holding the family together is a powerful and popular idea that is hard to let go of. They do have a point in that they are the majority of the shield wall. In war, they are the first to die and the last to be rewarded. If attacked by outsiders, their farms and homes are the ones that are most likely to be ransacked. The women and children are the ones who would bear the brunt of a foreign incursion just by being there and having something valuable to plunder or enslave.

The unfortunates have nothing of value or to protect; thus, they can easily escape to the cities or, more likely, out into the wilds during bandit raids or war. On the other hand, the townies are often protected by solid town walls and strong resident militia units. Secondly, the wealth of townies isn't about goods, even if large communities are more likely to have bigger stockpiles. Instead, the true wealth of townies is in their skill and lore, which are

inherent in their own selves and thus can be carried with them if they need to uproot themselves. Patricians might lead a military unit, but commanders rarely die on the battlefield, and most clashes take place far away from their lands and properties.

For the commoner, the land itself is the heart of his subsistence. They are the shield wall personified in that they form most of the rank and file and are expected to hold together or die in the dirt. Even though they don't own the land they are cultivating, they have invested much in making it valuable. This investment makes them vulnerable to outside aggression and is yet another reason for their strong ideals of stoicism, loyalty, and unity. Whether they speak of it or not, every commoner feels that Sun County isn't just an idea; it's their flesh and blood. Only the truly ambitious among them would leave part of themselves and the heritage of their entire family line behind and seek fortune, even military fortune, outside Sun County's borders when needed at home.

EDUCATION

Few among the commoners have more education than they received during their preparations for cult initiation. Some know letters enough to spell their name or perhaps even read simple signs, but few manage the written word well enough to call themselves literate. In contrast, oral traditions and memorization are highly valued, and many commoners can recite their List of Counts as readily as any literate scholar.

Higher education can be achieved when a gifted child progresses through the cult hierarchy or joins a Lore-based cult, like Lhankor Mhy. There's no formal ban or repression of learning, some steads and villages even have classes for adults to further their knowledge or pick up new skills. This is not limited to expertise that is relevant to their profession but also covers unrelated skills obtained purely for the joy of learning and the sense of community the classes bring. Learning in itself isn't seen as a matter of putting on airs, but flaunting it and using it unfairly in debates for personal gain is seen as unworthy.

A commoner knowledgeable in a subject is often brought in as an expert in disputes. With the recognition of that power also comes the responsibility not to misuse it. An expert shouldn't get personally involved in matters that are in his own expertise, and his fellow citizens are expected not to put them in an awkward position. Thus, it's considered bad form to argue Animal Lore with an expert unless you're one yourself. Further, it's unacceptable to put an expert into a position where they have to defend themselves or their own interests with their higher level of expertise against someone who lacks the same. If necessary, it's more polite to bring in another expert of the same level as the defender to act as a



champion for the accuser. Not doing so would be not only an inconvenience but also highly unfair.

LINGUISTICS

When they aren't quiet, Sun County's commoners frequently use local phrases and pronunciations. Their reluctance to speak unless necessary is both a leftover from military hierarchy but also has roots in the practical nature of common labor. Work is often physically exhausting. "You either talk, or you work" is a popular saying, meaning one can't do both simultaneously. Another reason is that words are seen as the source of conflict. To keep the peace, one should use them sparingly and well. To a commoner, words are rarely as comforting as practical aid. Instead, a thoughtless word could cause great strife and suffering.

Instead, they frequently use a wide and imaginative second, silent language, consisting of gestures and noises that express most of what is needed in day-to-day communication without being inflammatory. Locally, this silent language varies much, and not everything is as clear as it could be. A soft intake of air could mean yes or agreed, but in some outer rim territories, under the influence of Praxian customs, it could be seen as a threat or that there is an unresolved matter that will need to be dealt with later. A loud sucking of one's teeth could be approval or admiration, but in other circumstances and accompanied by body language, violent disapproval.

"Dome above, Brother."

It's the most common greeting phrase in Sun County. It's a mutual declaration that all people are equal and that the Sun Dome and Yelmario rule the skies.

"We Saved Your @-es in the Giant Wars."**

There is a common belief among the Sun County citizens that it was their ancestors alone who defeated the giants menacing Pavis in 877. In fact, it was a collaborative effort between several groups, but since the reward for the templars was to be allowed to settle the Zola Fel Valley south of Pavis and form Sun County, it has become local lore that their ancestors' contribution was the only one of any military value. The fact that Sun County was indeed founded by the people that they today hate and call foreigners and barbarians is a sore point among the citizens. This saying is mostly used by commoners, but if pressured enough, even the most knowledgeable of townies and patricians have been known to throw it into the faces of the arrogant city dwellers of Pavis. Most people of Pavis take offense at the saying, but there are others who, with urban aplomb, acknowledge the debt with a polite offering of thanks to the long-dead people who came to their aid nearly a thousand years ago.

"Sun County is the greatest place on earth!" or "Sun County!" for short.

Commoners are very proud of their accomplishments, and this is their way of saying it in an acceptably humble manner without drawing attention to themselves as individuals, as Sartarites are believed to do. It can be used in a wide variety of ways, often in alcohol-fueled shouting contests during festivals or when getting ready for combat or another great physical task. It can also be used sarcastically when things aren't going too well. Not everyone needs to be in on the user's sarcastic intent for it to work. In fact, it might be better if they aren't.

"You need to eat to be great."

The majority of food in Sun County, both the goods used for daily consumption and the emergency rations put in storage, is manufactured from the raw resources that the commoners produce. This saying is their way of letting everyone else know that while they appreciate that other people have flashier jobs and that their great deeds bring value to Sun County, nothing would be accomplished without their support. It's usually said when someone feels unappreciated, slighted, or confronted with a braggart from another class.

"Try to do anything without your back."

This phrase is a commoner letting someone know that their efforts feel unappreciated. It implies that they are the back; without it, the limbs (townies) and the head (patricians) would be useless. The unfortunates aren't too fond of this saying as they feel slighted by it. "Try using your ***-ing feet" is a good retort to use if you're one of them.

"Side by side, shield by shield."

Usually, one or the other of the parts are used informally. The whole saying is left for formal occasions and sounds a bit pompous to most. It's a military saying often repeated in the militia until it becomes second nature. More men than women make use of it. Women often say "Hip by hip" instead. Both are meant to display a belief in unity and solidarity. When someone thanks another, one would reply using either, in shortened form.

"If you're troubled, I have a rock for you to carry."

Usually shortened to just "I have a rock for you." This is a commoner's way of telling someone to stop whining and do something useful. Sometimes, when patience is limited, it might be a warning that you need to duck for a literal stone coming your way.



“Ernalda has many husbands, but she is my wife.”

“I have many husbands, but I’m Yelmalio’s wife.”

Both of these sayings express that while life is full of possibilities, traditions, and duty, there’s also choice, for better or for worse. It could be meant as an affirmation of a person’s duty, but it could also be twisted into sarcasm and the threat of change.

“Enough said.”

This short sentence means that the person feels that the conversation has dragged on too long or that words are no longer useful. It can imply that it’s time to get back to work, to leave, or to get ready to be challenged to a fight.

“Fair is fair.”

A statement of the obvious or a challenge, it’s hard to tell the difference. When someone uses it, it either means that everything is good or that it really isn’t. One has to judge from the context and the non-verbal communication to understand whether one should be content or wary.

“Fair enough.”

This expression is most often used to verbally confirm that an agreement has been reached. It can, however, also be used as a deflection of an insult or criticism when the injured side is showing either a change of heart or an agreement with the statement or that they are in violent disagreement but aren’t willing, able, or interested in making their case heard at this moment. Again, it is unwise to interpret the statement without carefully observing the context and body language of the interlocutors.

“Hold my shirt.”

Things are about to get violent. Telling this to one’s friend assumes that the person will accept one’s decision to engage in a brawl. The role of the shirthead is to keep the shirt safe and clean, but also for the holder himself to stay out of the brawl until the need comes to fair out the odds.

CUSTOMS

Bragging and the Peril of Flattery

Bragging and boasting are often seen as expressions of an individual’s selfish desire to stand out. That might explain why Sun County commoners are more inclined to brag and boast about their group’s achievements than their own. It’s more common for them to talk up the deeds of their own class, stead, village, or Sun County itself than to hear them bring unnecessary attention to themselves. Most people in Sun County, not just the commoners, feel the latter is shameful or embarrassing.

Ambitious people in all classes have discovered that it’s much more efficient to shower praise upon others in

the knowledge that the overall spirit of cooperation and reciprocity will put other people in one’s debt. This is an acceptable but not altogether appreciated way to further one’s own agenda. A heartfelt compliment can be welcome, but it can also be seen as unwelcome attention or, worse, as manipulative behavior. A person who is well-versed in Orate, Fast Talk, and Charm can be seen as ambitious, false, or ruthless if they fail to frame their flattery in a manner that makes sense to the group. In general, commoners are suspicious of good talkers if they haven’t already established themselves as honest, loyal people who use their skills in a reliable and responsible manner.

A common joke about the toilers and workers of the commoners is that not even on their deathbeds would they talk about their good deeds or leave heartfelt words to their loved ones to remember them by. Instead, their last words would be to express their worry about the next year’s harvest or, in some variants of the same joke, whether they put away the spade in the toolshed.

Commoners rarely afford more than one set of gold jewelry to declare their piety. Most gold accessories are family heirlooms. One who isn’t wearing any, either because they have been forced to sell them or never had the money to buy them in the first place, is referred to by the adjective “unglamorous.” It’s the polite way to say someone can be a good person despite lacking luster. Being unglamorous can even be seen as a compliment since a person who has struggled through hardship without gaining material advantages embodies the stoic nature of the Yelmalio cult.

As an extension of this reasoning, the anti-bragging custom of the commoners can take a strange form. A modest commoner is not talking about their deeds but their hardships and difficulties. This odd behavior has brought along a peculiar pride in having had a hard time and assumes that the person, despite their woes, still remains unbowed by circumstance. While no commoner would take public pleasure in another person’s burdens, there’s a certain sense of enjoyment in a public venting of one’s personal suffering. However, there’s a limit to how much you can whine about your woes without coming off as an uncultured clod, a weak person, or even a braggart. Knowing how to toe the line is something that usually separates the commoners from other classes.

There’s a popular social game that many enjoy called “When I Was Young,” which is a competition about who has had a harder time growing up. It can be played whenever one has breath enough to talk and shows that the quiet fortitude of commoners has a self-conscious aspect. No exaggerations are barred during the game as the contestants take turns telling their stories. The winner is the one who summons up the greatest roar of laughter. This game is jealously guarded by commoners, and if outsiders try to join, they are immediately met with complete silence and the abandonment of the game. Nevertheless,



it's been picked up by other classes, but playing it around commoners is a certain way to earn their contempt, if not outright enmity.

Doing more than one's Fair Share

In practice, bragging and showing off among commoners is not performed with any communication skill but by honest labor. Doing more than one's share, having energy left after a shift of work, and being willing to share it with others is the penultimate manner of showing strength and capability. To do it silently, graciously, and without drawing attention to oneself is the highest form of stoicism and good manners. Life conditions and the nature of work and its responsibilities are so similar among people making a living off the land that even a stranger visiting a stead or a village might see what needs to be done and figure out where their help is most needed. The militia service experience has made people used to working with others who are not their immediate kin and performing complex physical maneuvers and labor with complete strangers. The women, who have had to take up the slack while their brothers or husbands did their military service, are also well-versed in coming up with smooth ways to manage the burden of work when one or several members of the men are missing. For outsiders, it's a humbling experience to see commoners come together and manage to construct a barn, raise a bridge, or build a dam without outside leadership or even much pre-planning or organization needed.

The Elderly

Age is highly respected among commoners. An old worker is looked upon as someone who has sacrificed for the common good and now needs their rest. The role of the elderly changes with age when their bodies can't do the same tasks as they could in their youth. Instead, they are seen as vessels of experience and teachers of the skills they have amassed during their long lives. Their advice is listened to, but it's the individual skill and knowledge that determines if they are heeded or not. During collective work, the old people might stand on the sidelines, offering advice and stories or supervising the labor. This might be just as much a hindrance as an asset, and when their advice isn't much use, their true function is to maintain a cooperative spirit. Not everyone adapts to their new role well. Some might try to keep up a pretense of physical labor and do small tasks that are usually best suited for children, and if the person is a good one, people will treat their contribution as more useful than it is. Others might become bitter and frustrated from having to go from the realm of physical action to the arena of words, which might not be their forte.

Commoners take pride in how they treat their elders. They are quite aware of how humiliating it can be for an

old man or woman to no longer be able to contribute as they have in the past, and even the most cantankerous old cranks and crones are usually excused when they break the rules of good manners or silence. To keep the elderly happy and part of society is a responsibility everyone must share. If children have no other task to perform, one can always shove them into the presence of the old to keep each other busy, thus hitting two birds with one stone.

Violence

Compared to the unfortunates, the barrier between acceptable and unacceptable violence among commoners is well-defined and ritualized in a manner that even outsiders will have little trouble understanding. It's not acceptable to respond to verbal violence with physical violence, for example, even if no real harm was intended with the blow. However, when an argument reaches the point when words are no longer sufficient, violence can be accepted if the source of the argument is deemed justifiable enough and the fight won't inconvenience anyone unduly.

Duels among commoners are usually fought bare-knuckled and bare-chested and are commonly known as a "Two-Fisted-Settlement" or a "Brawl" for short. A proper brawl can be resolved with as much pomp and circumstance as if it would have been a formal duel between warriors. Duels with sharp blades require official sanction through a signed and stamped form, but brawls do not. Nevertheless, a proper brawl should include a challenge, witnesses, fair play, and all the other rules of a duel that don't concern themselves with the questions of arms and armor. A brawl can be a dramatic event and can even include several participants, as long as the numbers are fair. Witnesses aren't allowed to take part, but bystanders have been known to get sucked into brawls, whether they wanted to or not. At the conclusion of a brawl, matters are considered to be settled.

Children

Compared to the unfortunates, commoner children have both less freedom and more security. Among the commoners, the concept of childhood is an accepted and cherished period of a person's life. A child is supposed to learn by doing and observing but also to develop a strong identity of their own through play and experimentation. The child will, in good years, never go hungry or be subjected to violence.

Physical violence against children as a punishment is frowned upon by most. An adult is supposed to have enough self-discipline to endure bad behavior, mistakes, or disrespect without lashing out physically. Rationality pervades that it's not the child that should be punished for



doing wrong. The fault lies with the child's primary group, which hasn't taught them better.

Children of both genders learn at an early age that violence is only accepted in very special circumstances and only between adults. Arguments and fights between children are handled with all participants considered equally to blame. Good parenting is separating the quarreling children first and then punishing them by making them work together to come up with solutions to tricky tasks, if for no other reason than settling their differences so that everyone will feel that they have been fairly treated. It's not until a boy's initiation into adulthood that he is considered ready to learn how to resolve a Two-Fisted Settlement.

Fairness

Fairness is a concept considered to be something that doesn't exist without effort; it is created and upheld by rationality, self-discipline, and work. It's an act of will that separates Man from Beast. Just as everyone must uphold the shield wall, it is everyone's obligation to make sure that the efforts and rewards of participating in it are shared equally. While it's understood that authority should treat its citizens fairly, it's also expected that citizens, regardless of class and lineage, should behave and treat other citizens in a fair manner. The concept of fairness is especially important to commoners, as they see themselves as doing the majority of the hard labor involved in maintaining the shield wall. They reason that they don't mind doing their part as long as their recompense is fair.

Many commoners take the concept of fairness with them into other cults and professions and integrate it with Passions such as Loyalty, Honour, Love, and even Hate.

To behave in a fair manner, to not take more than what is needed, for example, or to not kick a person who is down or challenging a person of inferior capabilities, are seen as a matter of self-control. The refusal to follow through on one's Passion can and is frequently used as an insult. To not take a fight with a person means that one considers them beneath oneself in skill, ability, and worth.

To an outsider, this can lead to some confusing situations.

Example: An Orlanthi foreigner is hiding out among some Sun County relatives. A drunken argument gets out of hand, and he strikes a man of his own clan, a citizen of Sun County. He is no doubt surprised that the man leaves without punching back. To the Orlanthi, this is seen as cowardice, perhaps, or of his kin having abandoned his proud Orlanthi roots. To the Sun County Orlanthi, it's obvious that the visitor isn't a part of the shield wall and wouldn't survive without his family's support, and he is thus reluctant to fight him. If he truly dislikes the man, it could be interpreted as an insult as well, one that the foreigner wouldn't understand.

Hygiene

A common insult or prejudice against commoners is that they are smelly or enjoy being filthy. To a commoner, the smell of sweat is just as unattractive as it is to unfortunates, townies, and patricians, but it's seen as an unavoidable result of honest work. A good person washes up after work or apologizes for the odor.

Many commoners spit upon the ground or into the fire, a habit uncommon among townies or patricians. This is seen as being close to the world and to the two runes of Earth or Fire. It's often called a "Farmer's kiss" but is not only used by people of that profession.

Careful Words

In a class where cooperation is so fundamental, honesty is a necessity. One must be able to talk freely about the assessment of labor, skill, and ability to cooperate efficiently. Commoners are infamous for their brutally honest appraisal of a person's work or manner. On the other hand, honesty is a double-edged sword, and too much of it can cause disruption of unity.

What outsiders fail to appreciate is that commoners take consensus and unity into consideration before offering their opinions on something so important as a person's capability for work. Their words can sound harsh, but the intent isn't meant to hurt. On the contrary, they usually go out of their way to offer a contrasting positive assessment together with the bad one. Since compliments tend to be expressed in an understated manner, nearly all of it sounds bad.

Example: Erbod is looking for someone to help fix a ripped blanket. Wanna has offered to help, so Erbod asks Tilda what she thinks of her sewing abilities. The answer might be something like: "I wouldn't let her sew my dress for the festival, that's for sure, but she's got a level head and isn't afraid of the shears."

Respect the Labor

Commoners put much stock in their ability to work. Good work is valuable; in the long run, it is the difference between eating and starving. People should take great pride in their work and not do anything but their best. By working hard, one can compensate for a lack of skill, but nothing can compensate for a lack of effort. Being ignorant or unskilled isn't half as bad as being lazy or selfish. "One learns by doing" is a common saying. So, what one lacks in brains, one makes up for in brawn.



THE TOWNIES

*Professional, Shine, Towner, Book Reader, Fop, Cluster****er, Sap, Crowdie, Eater.*

LIFE CONDITIONS

Life is good, but it can be hard as well.

As the name suggests, townies are walled off, isolated and surrounded on all sides, much like how Sun County sees itself politically. While they are a minority, they often act as if they are the majority of Sun County citizens. This says more about how they see themselves and their nation rather than any factual truth. Townies are the one class that is in-between everyone else. They have the freedom and the ability to move socially and financially in any direction. When they say that they are just an average man or woman or the backbone of the country, they really mean that they are whom they would prefer to have as representatives of Sun County. It is a telling sign of their fears of not being valued or counted for much.

The Valued Few

While their existence is one of endless possibilities, townies often express that they have an untapped and unappreciated potential. Due to their lack of numbers, their production capabilities, counted in sheer tonnage, are nowhere near what commoners manage. Military speaking, they're rarely of the rank and file. Instead, they make up a minority of the shield wall as officers and specialist personnel. From the perspective of Sun County's values of unity and common good, this is a sore spot for townies. The nature of their work, producing art, refining raw materials into goods, and maintaining knowledge, has led to a fractured class identity without a strong, unified voice to promote their own worth. Further complicating the matter is that nearly half of their produce consists of immaterial goods, such as art and education, of which the impact upon the common good is almost impossible to measure adequately.

Townies can be likened to a man sitting on a rickety fence, pulled between two equally strong demands. On one side, they are beset by their cults and the strong commoner class demanding unity and the common good. On the opposite side, the much smaller but influential patrician class and the state of Sun County itself demand the production of goods that require highly individualistic skill sets.

In a way, the townie identity has become dependent on a highly malleable demand of the impossible, where their worth is only as high as their latest contribution. So far, this lack of clear purpose has been countered by an attempt

to educate as much of Sun County as possible to raise the social worth of such unquantifiable subjects as quality and reliability. While this has led to much goodwill among commoners, it has also led to suspicion and regulation from the powers in charge. In their struggles to maintain their self-respect as highly skilled artisans and the worth of the individual specialists in the shield wall, townies often come off as elitist and snobbish. This is especially true for cultural affairs, which are highly important to the creators and performers of art as a means for self-expression and identity but, to the great majority of people, are seen as pass-time luxuries.

Commoners often feel unappreciated for their hard work and as if they are taken for granted, but the same argument can be made about townies. It's hard for anyone to deny the commoner effort, as food is undeniably a prerequisite of human life. For townies, however, their main contributions to society, like culture, leadership, administration, and knowledge, are, with the exception of the production of mass consumer luxury goods, intangible products. For the townies, there is little solid proof of their commitment to society as a whole. While commoners must toil to survive in the word's literal meaning, the struggles for this budding middle class are about meaning and purpose. Their reason for being alive, their function, and their contribution to society is open to interpretation. This makes life and identity formless and something that one must shape oneself. An individual problem in a society that doesn't put much worth in the singular.

Breaking the Norm

Another problem for townies is gender-related pride. Much of their work goes against traditional commoner standards of what a man or a woman should be and do. To the rest of society, townies don't risk their lives among the front ranks of the wall. Instead, they are protected by it in the same manner that women and children are. They are not "true warriors" in the Yelmalian tradition who stoically suffer arrows and spears. Instead, they are officers at best, which isn't as celebrated in Yelmalian legend, or helpless civilians that need to be secured at worst. It doesn't really matter if the officers are prepared to die with their men when they, as a class, are closely associated with the towns that need to be protected inside the shield wall. Their entire existence is sustained by the fact that other people's work guarantees their security. In fact, this security has offered them the means to educate themselves and acquire their highly specialized skills. While many townies are aware of their privileges, few want to talk about them. Instead, they prefer to shift any discussion towards owning their positions due to adherence to classical Yelmalian traits such as self-discipline and hard work.



A Precarious Position

Discussing the privileged position of townies without mentioning that it's also precarious would be unfair. The strength of their upward mobility, education, and skills in acquiring wealth are also their greatest danger. What goes up can come down, and in Sun County, even the highest can fall to the very bottom of society at a moment's notice. Their fear of a sudden social fall seems ridiculous next to the very real threat of death and starvation among commoners or the unfortunates, but their anxiety is not unfounded. In Sun County, those closest to volatile subjects, such as politics, art, and education, are the most likely to fall.

Being stuck in the middle, with a privileged position and the capability to stockpile goods that are enviable to others, also means a great deal of insecurity that seems paradoxical to the relatively safety of a town. Townies might be physically safe from outside threats, such as marauding rider tribes or rampaging chaos beasts, but their position is, at least according to themselves, envied by all. To them, all lower classes are either something to define themselves against or direct enemies trying to usurp their privileges. Patricians, while being the one group they want to stay in the good graces of or even join to prove their worth, are also the ones that have the power to send them to the salt mines. This is a real danger as their education, finances, and political powers are the things that patricians might see as a threat. And if not the patricians themselves, then competition of other townie families that see every fall from grace as an opportunity for themselves to rise.

The small number of salaried positions available for the educated also contributes to a harsh and competitive social and financial climate. Beneath the fine surroundings and peaceful day-to-day life of a Sun County town lurks an atmosphere that can best be likened to a form of undeclared, hidden warfare between everyone and all. Occasionally, the clandestine struggle for dominance is fought on a larger scale between different professions or factions, but most of the competition takes place between groups no larger than families. This combat is fought mostly in the social and financial arenas but can sometimes take on physical violence in everything from assassin attempts to riots. This perpetual competition is a source of great stress for the individual townie but barely comprehensible or even visible to the outsider. Even townies with more hands-on professions, such as redsmiths or potters, feel this pressure, as changing tastes mean they might lose their customers as fashion shifts. There is a constant arms race of innovation versus tradition, and nobody is sure what or who will be in the vogue next season.

City Life

A typical townie is under a lot of pressure. While major change can be rare but sudden in Sun County, the townscape seems forever in motion. It's easy for a visitor to be overwhelmed by the high sensory overload that a seasoned townie has learned to suppress. To protect themselves from hostile spirits drawn to the volatile human nature of the town, townies must keep their defenses up. Contradictorily, a truly successful townie living in Sun Dome or Helmbold is also expected to keep all their senses open, and thus vulnerable, to what goes on around them so they do not miss out on an opportunity.

A person growing up in a major population center has become skilled at moving from passive spectator to active entrepreneur at a moment's notice, and that is why outsiders often think of city-dwellers as either lethargic or overly excitable. They have come to expect consistent, rapid sensorial stimulation from their surroundings. They can often feel anxious, even a little lost, when confronted with the serene nature of a farmstead.

The peculiar landscape of towns forms its citizens. Outsiders believe that the closed terrain has made townies so sheltered from the natural elements that they have grown soft or weak, spiritually as well as physically. This isn't necessarily true, as many professions that deal with arts and crafts can involve demanding physical tasks; a potter has strong hands from kneading clay, and a redsmith needs a good constitution to work in a hot smithy. While often portrayed in the popular culture of the unfortunates and the commoners as shirking their duty, most able-bodied townie men serve their time in the militia like any other proud Yelmalian. Not all people living in towns belong to the townie class; there's also a strong contingent of commoners and unfortunates living in the same arena, who would be insulted if anyone called them soft. Many young men, often the youngest brothers, without other prospects, have to make a career out of soldiering, forming the main part of the officer corps of the Sun County militia and even the rank and file of specialized professional mercenary units.

Due to the highly concentrated work areas of towns and the developed infrastructure, hard-working citizens can sometimes go days without leaving their house or workshop, relying on deliveries of food and water from the local businesses. Paradoxically, this has resulted in a particular urban loneliness. Even while living in a densely populated area, a typical townie person might not have more close relationships with others than someone from a rural upbringing.

Most townies live in one-family houses, but there are exceptions. The less affluent are forced to live close together. Their lives are not unlike those of certain tribal peoples or like the much-despised Orlanthi. Those from



rich or influential families have most likely spent their lives in larger houses where the various family members might have had access to not just one but several rooms bordered off as their private accommodations. The sharp contrast between public and private life has given most citizens a high respect for the border between the private and public spheres. Nowhere else is the difference between the public and private personas as disparate as among townies.

Downplaying Privilege

While they are the most socially mobile group with many opportunities to move up in the hierarchy, townies avoid acknowledging their privileges; indeed, they often downplay them as a true Yelmalian should. This can be an infuriating trait for commoners who struggle to make a living and for the unfortunates who are in a daily fight to survive. Outsiders often mistake the unwillingness of townies to discuss their inherited advantages as arrogance or ignorance. It wouldn't occur to them that townies often feel as isolated, powerless, and afraid as people from other classes. To them, the world can be pleasurable and luxurious but also incomprehensible due to its size and complexity. This lack of certainty, coupled with the risk of being outmaneuvered by a rivaling family, which at its worst can mean exile or death, means that the townies live in a climate of silent anxiety and fear without clear foes like starvation or raiders to fight. A wise townie might put this existential dilemma as follows: "There's no honorable foe for us to fight; therefore, we often become the foes of others."

When their guard is down, a town-dweller often comes off as cynical and slightly self-pitying. They feel that they are alone, isolated from the common man, either by learning or lifestyle. Their small families leave them without the support structures other classes take for granted. They can't count on sympathy because there are always others who are worse off. They feel that there are so few positions open and so few chances to inherit that large families often turn on themselves, fighting one another like rabid dogs.

Keeping up Appearances

What they might confide in private, they need to deny in public, and townies often put a lot of effort into maintaining an impregnable social façade. Appearances are important; one can often expect townies to be clean, perfumed, well-dressed, and accessorized. Adhering to the latest fashions, whether in apparel or consumption of culture or foods, is portrayed as "personal taste" but is really a social signifier for the more affluent families to distance themselves from the ones that lack the means to keep up with the frequent and rapid changes of what is considered being cultured.

They take great pride in education, culture, and specialized skills. Being learned, communicative, adaptable, and cultured are highly regarded attributes. While success speaks its own language, the lack of it is easily excused if working for the common good. For the outsider, townies tend to refer to the common good in a confusing manner, as if the common is a part of the other, the alien, that must be saved by the specialized skills of the middle class.

EDUCATION

Most towns have some form of public school available to those who can afford their fees. The more affluent families hire tutors that train their children communally or privately. While most skills, even lore, are transmitted orally and learned mnemonically, many townies are taught to read and write, sometimes in several languages. Apart from various crafts and arts, communication skills are highly valued to navigate city life.

LINGUISTICS

The complicated lives of townies with their many rivals and enemies have made them hypersensitive to social communication. To keep interaction between rivals as civil and non-violent as possible, townies have taken the unseeing and stoic ideals and turned them into a social art form. They must make good use of social skills to get through a day in the city without getting tangled in complex relations that don't concern them. A laugh, a dry joke, or a shrug can defuse uncomfortable situations without dropping one's public persona of stoicism and self-discipline.

"There is no Harmony in town life, just Stasis."

This is a common cynical expression. One meaning is that the more things change, the more they stay the same. The town is not a peaceful place to live, and there can be no true harmony among townies until stasis is overcome. Another is that towns, who should spearhead change, are terrified of it. Alternatively, depending on one's point of view, even if Sun County culture needs to change, towns are forced to follow consensus. It's often used as a sardonic counter to the Sun County idiom, "To stay the same, we must change."

"It's good to get away from the town."

A pleasantry that everyone is assumed to agree with. It explains why a town-dweller isn't where they are supposed to be but doesn't offer a serious explanation since that would be a breach of etiquette. It portrays town life as something hard to endure in the long run but isn't critical enough to imply that the converser lacks self-discipline.



The assumption is that there are limits to what one puts up with for appearance's sake.

“It’s very nice, but I wouldn’t like to live there.”

A typical townie, non-insulting insult.

“Man and Beast are two predators in different skins.”

Another townie cynicism that got popular when the Lunar Empire and its depraved lore of relativities were at their peak of influence in Sun County. To the townie, the saying was the height of witticism and thus refinement, but to most outsiders, it was ridiculous posturing by a class unlikely to meet or engage with either hostile men or predators.

“My/our place” or “the usual spot.”

Confusingly for outsiders, when a townie uses the term “my place,” they often refer to their favorite public house. If a citizen of Sun Dome agrees to meet at “their place” at a specific time, one should ask for the establishment’s name if uncertain. To ask for a person’s private address is never done; it’s offered to those who need to know.

“I’m a professional” or “It’s a question of professional pride.”

Townies often talk about being proud of adhering to professional standards, meaning they are very good at their work. They are so skillful, in fact, that they can produce the same item repeatedly without loss of quality and even make them so similar in appearance that it would take another craftsperson to tell the difference between the objects. This way of thinking, and the saying itself, has spread from artisans to artists and even military men and scholars. An artist, for example, pressed for time to deliver a work, would use this argument to explain that it’s impossible for him to produce a piece of artwork of inferior quality just to meet the client’s demand for speed. A good warrior would, for example, congratulate another for a skilled blow or command to demonstrate that they, too, are a professional and able to judge another.

“Oh really? You don’t say? How curious. What a marvelous way to look at it.”

This is an example of saying something while saying absolutely nothing at all. While commoners are infamous for staying quiet no matter what happens, townies are equally infamous for being able to talk while not communicating. Good orators are sometimes referred to as “conversationalists” among townies. They can tell a story so well that everyone who listens feels that they, too, have taken part in telling it.

“Life is unfair.”

This idiom is rarely meant as a complaint; when it is, it’s more of a statement to show that one accepts it. Commonly, it’s used as a retort when hearing about other people’s misfortunes, either as an encouragement, by way of acknowledging that we are at least equal in suffering the slingshots of fate, or as a semi-polite way of saying that the person should stop whining and move on. The view of fairness is probably the biggest divider between commoners and townies. Commoners insist that it’s man’s duty to make life fair for everyone, while townies haven’t got anything to gain from letting anyone believe that something can be done about it.

CUSTOMS

Personal Ambition

To townies, it’s important to pay close attention to the political climate, to be a part of unity, or at least pay lip service to it, but in stark contrast to most other classes, personal ambition isn’t just a pipedream but a viable life path. Townies have the privilege of being able to think of opportunities, not just as a part of the collective but as individuals. They can imagine a life away from most constraints of their background and, if affluent enough, go where they feel like it.

Skill, being an ability that a person carries within them, as opposed to a farm or two hundred cows, means that highly skilled people, such as townies, have the freedom of movement. If something displeases them, they can take their skills and leave. This is what makes the townie class so unreliable and dangerous yet so important. Sun County must accept their relative freedom as a price to pay for their services. Indeed, the last few administrations have invested much time and finances in bettering this part of the population. The less conservative voices in the Yelmali cult have pushed for social mobility precisely to build up a strong middle class so that Sun County can be independent of other nations like the Lunar Empire or Esrolia for imports of vital goods.

To the people gifted with this kind of foresight, the shield wall consists of more than shields and spears, and educated citizens are an investment. As soon as the townie class stops feeling that their ambition can be fulfilled within the borders of Sun County, they might look elsewhere. The Lunar Empire challenged the culture of Sun County, and the conservatives found that their grip on the townies and unfortunates was sorely lacking. This led to the current regime’s crackdown on anything Lunar. The Summer of Love opened up new possibilities for some classes, townies and unfortunates especially, and that will be hard for the Count to suppress permanently. So far, the Count has nothing new



to offer the townie class but fear and prohibition to stop their ambitions, and if he wants things to stay the way they are, he needs to make things change. Soon.

Boasting and Bragging

For townies, it goes without saying that it's not always the most dedicated or suitable person who gets the position or reward. They have come to regard social corruption as a natural part of life. Ambitious people have adopted practices to cope with it, while others refuse them outright. However, they all know that flattery, intrigue, and social interaction are just as efficient in achieving success as being good at one's job.

Pride in one's work and personal skill is something almost sacred among the craftsmen of the townie class and has such power that it can even excuse a lack of manners. Boasting and bragging are distasteful practices among townies, just as elsewhere in Sun County. As among the commoners, townies never discuss their individual skills as craftsmen. The quality of the products should speak for themselves.

But there's some leeway to enhance one's social value if one boasts with a certain flair, where the boast in itself shows education or cultural refinement. Masquerading one's boasting as profusions for the common good is a valued skill and a normal part of social life.

Children and Youths

It's assumed that children should be free from labor and spend their time learning, both from play and formal education. Physical discipline is frowned upon, and parents are supposed to reason with their children to make them behave in a socially respectful manner. There's a high degree of social control within the townie class for keeping the behavior of children and youths within acceptable standards. Parents are responsible for the manners of their children, and a family can be temporarily or permanently ostracized for particularly flagrant misdeeds. So, while physical discipline is deemed uncultured, it's considered acceptable in severe cases, as long as it's private.

There's a universal belief among townies that their children should enjoy as much freedom, safety, and happiness as possible as long as they respect the patriarchal structure. Generally, children have been seen as objects belonging to their parents and to Sun County as a whole. This is starting to change as townie youths become aware of having choices and seeing themselves as subjects, even before adulthood. A conflict between generations is brewing between the strict patriarchal families and the "love-children" that grew up—often without parental supervision—during the Summer of Love. To the most fervently conservative patriarchs, the love-children are

considered to be undisciplined, lazy, ignorant, spoilt, rude, and dangerously self-centered. Their parents are failures, corrupted by Lunar influence, and these "summer-children" are seen as a lost generation.

Violence

While it's perfectly acceptable to dominate one's surroundings with verbal violence, as long as it's performed in a tasteful and witty manner, physical violence is seen as the resort of an uncultured person, too dim-witted to defend themselves in a battle of tongues.

However, dueling is an acceptable manner to resolve a spat between men in a physical manner, as long as all the rituals are respected. Duels should be fought in public, but in a place where there's no risk of hurting or inconveniencing a bystander or damaging the property of the same. With crowded towns and curious bystanders, this is more easily said than done. With the busy schedule of townies, duels might have to be postponed to accommodate participants and witnesses. The most famous example of bad luck when trying to settle a duel was the Urham-Povol duel of 1579. It was postponed twenty-six years due to mismatching schedules until the patriarch of the Povol family died 1605 of natural causes. As he left no male heirs, the matter is still unresolved.

Just because violence is frowned upon doesn't mean it doesn't happen. It's more likely to occur out of sight, in private or secluded places. The militia is unwilling to enter citizens' homes unless there's evidence of a major crime being committed. While some Babeester Gor are living in towns, they are often busy attending to temple duties. The result is that while violence between family members, especially between men and women, is judged as unacceptable from a social point of view, there are few safeguards against it. With the new clothing restrictions for women in effect, it's easier than ever to hide marks of violence. This is yet another reason for the cultists of Babeester Gor to refuse and resist the use of veils.

In contrast, one of the reasons why vengeance takers and protectors of the Babeester Gor are so unpopular and feared among townies is their tendency to disrespect public and private borders. If an Axe Sister hears a woman being abused, she's quite likely to kick down the door and do something about it. As townies would have it, they'd be causing "a scene," which is considered bad taste. Townies are very peculiar about theater and think it should only be performed by trained actors, not rude, door-kicking amateurs.

Violence between competing families to assert dominance is often talked about and has been highly romanticized in popular culture. It's, however, less common than what ballads, literature, and plays might suggest. While being abhorred for its bad taste, violence is also seen as a

pragmatic act. Something that can and will happen when situations demand it. Military violence against foreigners is seen as necessary, not only to protect Sun County but its interests, as well. The townie class, with its financial interests and privileged position in the military structure, is more likely to suggest the use of it outside its borders than someone from the commoner class.

Hospitality

Sun County towns are crowded places. Most dwellings are just large enough to satisfy the needs of their occupants, and the typical townie family has very little physical space or facilities to host social events. To show hospitality, townies instead invite friends and visiting family to public houses that serve food and alcohol or to guest houses that rent out rooms and beds. In such cases, the inviting party pays the bill, and the rented place is considered a temporary part of the host's home. It's not uncommon to see one table at a public house celebrating a wedding while another table is hosting a funeral. This is why the skill of unseeing is so important and why it's vital to have good manners and not inconvenience others. To make the shift between public and private as un-jarring as possible, most public houses have a bell on each table for a guest to ring to notify that they enter or want service, and public hotels are expected to have a bell at the reception area.

Being hosted at a public house comes with duties of their own. Guests are expected to behave in a manner that is respectful of their surroundings as a temporary home of not just their hosts but of other hosts sharing the same public house. All the normal rules of behavior are in effect, and it is the guests' duty to contribute to the desired ambiance of the gathering. If it's a social occasion, they'll have to be sociable to the best of their abilities; if it's a business meeting, to be agreeable and business-like, or if a funeral is appropriately mournful. If several gatherings are happening simultaneously, then a townie should give most of his attention to the one they are invited to, but not so much that they are disrupting the other gatherings under the same roof. This can lead to quite complex situations, as the really well-behaved townie would pay his respects to the funeral, cheer the newlyweds, but nevertheless be a good guest at the social function they have been invited to, such as a tournament of "The Light of Reason," a common game for the intellectuals, which is described on page 209. Social gatherings like this have something of a performative nature for the townie class. It's not only outsiders who feel that it's hard to relax and enjoy the occasion, and most would probably admit that social occasions can be just as draining as they are pleasant.

Some public places have specialized services to cater to a particular group of people to the exclusion of others. Those gatherings are usually quite discreet, especially

if they break Sun County culture's social norms. This subterfuge shouldn't be overstated, as half of it comes from the consideration of townies to unsee anything that doesn't fit in. Usually, these groups are so proficient at blending in, and outsider townies are so good at unseeing that townies not belonging to said groups might be unaware of anything strange should they happen to stroll into the place. For example, in the small town of Goldbreath, there is a tea house that caters to women seeking the company of other women, as well as a small beer hall for men desiring to socialize in a men-only group. In Sun Dome, a public house called The Far Out Inn arranges cultural events that are very popular with the youths of the Love-Child generation. While these establishments might not refuse service to people outside of that particular group, to the acute social senses of the townies, it's often obvious to them when they're not the intended guests, and they feel obligated to unsee and leave the premises as quickly as possible.

Balance Before Absolutes

The Harmony rune is generally seen as positive in most of Sun County, but to townies, it can also be the enemy of the self-interest vital to making a living in a fluctuating townscape. Stasis can be advantageous for commerce and education, but Movement is also practical for trade and art. While most professional groups prefer one side of the scale of balanced runes, the stereotypical town dweller often feels it's more advantageous to be a little of everything. To people dependent on one side over the other to practice their trade, and this goes for town-dwellers and rural people, the





fight to preserve them. They need to protect the family and their investments, not just for their ancestors, but for the next generation and those who will come after. Forever.

Example: Being part of the elite is a fairly individual experience. While Lady Vega is the Guardian of Sun County, leader of the Sun Dome Militia, and main heir of the Goldbreath family, the responsibility isn't solely on her shoulders, as long as she has other family members to count on for support. Her mother, Astra Goldbreath, for example, knows just about everyone worth knowing in Sun County, and Penta, her twin sister, just happens to be the High Priestess of the Ernalda temple, the highest office available if you ask half of Sun County's citizens. To Vega, Astra, and Penta, life is full of expectations and duties. They have to carefully consider the results of even the most trivial of social interactions so as not to lose their influence.

In contrast, Joy Goldbreath, Vega's youngest sister, is living the life of a party girl as she's fluttering around Sun County, doing whatever she pleases. To avoid being sucked into power politics or being married off to a man she would detest, she has joined a cult of fanatics, the Chalana Arroy. If it weren't for her cult affiliation, her life would have been very much a gilded cage. Being an initiate of this cult means she has a license to travel, and since it's not under Ernalda's hierarchy, no one in her family can tell her what to do. However, the cult itself comes with many duties that she needs to uphold, and it's unlikely that she won't be considered for the role of priestess as soon as she's old and mature enough. So, her hard-won freedom might not last as long as she would wish. It is quite telling that few speak of Jovian Goldbreath, the oldest son, and exactly why he is not considered the head of the family, instead eking out a living as a Militia Captain.

The life of a priest or a noble can seem peaceful and safe, but it's also a position that comes with danger and strife. Few families are without personal conflicts, and in-fighting can tear a family apart. Patricians aren't immune to assassinations from ambitious relatives. If that wasn't enough, other families are always fighting for dominance. To the ambitious families of the upper class, being at the top is a zero-sum game. As of yet, patrician in-fighting has never gone as far as the infamous Lunar Dart Competitions, but who knows what the future might bring?

Culture as a Weapon

When patrician families have similar living standards, it's hard for outsiders to tell the ones with a long lineage apart from the upstarts. Everyone seems equally powerful or worthy of their position. To some families, it can be an advantage to seem either more or less influential depending on the current political status, but practically every family wants to appear legitimate. Generally speaking, there are

two ways for the old lineage families to separate themselves from the herd of the new rich. The first is being cultured, having acquired and understood the traditional customs; the other is style, which demonstrates one's cultured nature. It's in the interest of the old lineage families to make culture and style as hard to mimic as possible for all other classes, including those of their own that are burdened by a younger lineage.

There's a race between the old money and the new to acquire and display culture. Patricians are the creators of fads and fashions. It's their patronage that supports many artists and craftsmen. Being first, an early user of culture, and understanding it well enough to promote it is seen as being influential and powerful. However, there's a fine line between appearing as a genuine patron of the arts (and culture in general) and looking as if one is trying too hard. Being able to walk this path requires style. For members of the older lineages, style is not taught; it's inherited by tradition, and the lower lineages cannot do more than mimic it.

To stay at the top, families from older lineages want to separate themselves from the "riff-raff," the upstart families that are entering the patrician arena due to recently acquired wealth. The weapon of choice is their cultural skills; fighting is vicious and merciless, and no one is considered innocent or off-limits due to age or gender. Even the most innocuous social events are treated with the same seriousness as a military conqueror might plan their campaign. A romantic, private meeting between lovers is never what it seems, and a quiet family dinner might be anything from an information-gathering event to a purge within the ranks. Everything is a power struggle, and most patricians have been raised in this climate of fear and paranoia, with long-lasting trust issues and emotional detachment from political businesses as a result.

Power as Weakness

To the patricians, the loss of power, both for the individual and the family as a whole, can be catastrophic. It might mean anything from ostracization to downright murder. Patricians might seem immune from the hardships of everyday life. Still, their struggle can be as nasty and brutal as that between rivaling clans in Sartar fighting over a tract of land, with grudges going so far back that there is no longer one story about why it came to be but enough of them to fill an entire scroll. Most dangerous of all is to have a falling out with the Count, who can theoretically sentence an entire family line to exile or hard labor.

While having one's entire family line eradicated is technically possible and a constant source of fear among the patricians, the reality of the threat is harder to carry through. Most of the family could be banished, but even if they were denied using their family name, they would still



count as part of their family and lineage. If the entire line were to be exiled or killed off, the name would still live on in people's memories. A long-entrenched family is harder to get rid of than one might think. On the other hand, most Counts would hesitate to do something as drastic as that since not even the Count is immune to assassinations and coup d'états. The Count's power base depends on the families' goodwill and cooperation; ultimately, he is as mortal as the rest of them.

A family as powerful or influential as the Goldbreaths or the Eiskolli is more in touch with the people than the current Count could ever hope to be. If they wanted to influence the other families and classes to agree that a new consensus might be needed, the Count would have to use military might to stay in power. With Sun Dome Militia in the hands of Vega Goldbreath, Count Solanthos would have to enlist foreign assistance.

EDUCATION

Patricians are among the most educated individuals in Sun County. Private tutors ensure children can read at an early age, and subjects such as history and statecraft are the focus of much memorization. Suppose someone shows an interest in philosophy or the sciences. In that case, they will have ample time to indulge their interests even if they do not become a philosopher or enter the ranks of the Lhankor Mhy.

LINGUISTICS

To display culture, patricians use language as a tool, but in reality, it's far more than that. Words can kill. They are weapons. Patricians are usually fluent in several languages, and whoever doesn't know how to read and write in at least one language is showered in ridicule. Some patrician families use a slightly old-fashioned Heortling to suggest that they haven't changed much since they arrived in these lands. Many of the newly rich try to mimic their language use, which, in turn, can be a source of ridicule, as it's a style that is hard to get just right. Others, even among the older families, have dispensed with formality and consider it in poor taste. Goldbreath is one of those, which might explain part of their current popularity.

"But that is so last year..."

At one time, Lunar clothing was very in. Now it's out. Veils and fully covering clothes for women have come back in style and have limited the expression of certain kinds of clothes and accessories. Leave it to patricians and even townies to find new ways to wear it to display one's taste and money while staying out of trouble. For patricians, clothes aren't just to protect you from the elements. Clothes convey wealth, status, and taste. Food and culture aren't

subsistence or a way of life but products to be consumed and appreciated for their artistic merit. Appearance is everything to the patricians, and there isn't a youth among them who hasn't got a quality mirror in their chambers. There's a certain art to enhance one's culture and legitimacy, and it's often expressed in a manner that lowers someone else's. However, the truly stylish manage to raise their own value, as well as their surroundings, without letting discontent affect the shield wall.

"This is Sun County!"

"Go bother someone else, you vile man. This is Sun County!"

—Joy Goldbreath to an officer of the GOD.

This legendary saying is connected to the historical event known as the Sun County Kick. It refers to an incident in 1610 when the Light Son Amodus Brighthorn kicked a priestess of the Seven Mothers down the stairs of his residence for unclear reasons. Legend has it that Brighthorn was so infuriated by her vile demands to let her tutor orphans in a building on his family land that it sent him into an uncontrollable fury. Others maintain that it was her status as a foreigner of a perverse and unsavory nature that offended him. Some say that this was an act of heroic defiance by a true patriot. Others said it was because she was wearing red on a Fireday, and that is the true origin of the expression "seeing red" as a metaphor for becoming unreasonably angry.

Most believers are united in their belief in the supernatural force of the kick and maintain that the kick was so mighty that it sent the fully armed and armored priestess not only down the stairs but that the earth itself opened up around her and sucked her straight down to hell. A rare but glorious example of Ernalda showing wifely martial support for her warrior husband. Some, however, maintains that the priestess was unharmed but perplexed. It was not this act that kicked off the rebellion against the Red Count, but it was close enough in time that they became intrinsically associated with each other. Some even attribute the act to Count Solanthos.

For years, combat instructors of the militia have had to dissuade young recruits from practicing the Sun County Kick during drills since it has no real military value. Despite many instructors' insistence that a shield bash is a much more effective maneuver than a one-footed thrust, it has only enhanced the status of the legendary kick. That no one has ever managed to re-create its effect, is proof enough of its divinely powered force.

The saying, most commonly delivered without a kick, is popular among all classes, usually to show patriotic fervor, but it has a more important meaning to patricians. To them, it's about their right to behave as they want. They created Sun County, and therefore, they are Sun County. Within its



borders, they should be free to act in any manner. Indeed, it proves there is a limit to even the best-behaved patrician's grace and patience. Any Count knows that he will have to be able to handle the insolent nature of the noble families, but as long as their actions can be framed in innocent ways, it's usually more convenient for the Count to unsee what new folly a family hothead has committed.

“Have you ever had a Lunarian feast?”

“No, thank you, I've seen enough blood today, Just a bowl of dates with a side-bowl of fresh water for me, please.”

– Joy Goldbreath.

Always trying the latest and being the first with the newest isn't always guaranteed success. It is just as likely a person would look like they are trying too hard. The most powerful patrician trendsetters are so skillful at maintaining their grip on what's in or out that it's hard to tell how they do it and why. They wield the power to reject what's popular and bring back something old and unfashionable.

“I would never ride a [zebra, bison, llama]!”

Eccentricity can mean the most bizarre statements and refusals. Unless the noble feels charitable, they won't offer an explanation for refusing to wear one color, eat one food group, or insist others do the same. They expect people to cater to their wishes without comment. It could be seen, and perhaps also is, a demonstration of power, but it can just as well be an old family tradition that an outsider wouldn't be expected to know about. In any case, it's a marker that even if a noble person is in your presence and perhaps even your friend, they will never be your equal. Yelmalian commoners says it is a geas without gifts and should be honored.

“They couldn't possibly hit us from over there!”

This expression and a variant called “Thirty-two Arrows” stem from the same event. At the battle of Moonbroth in 1118, general Opalim Glittergold sorely misjudged the capabilities of his enemies and overestimated his own, and the first statement proved to be his last. For some reason, he's still considered one of the finest generals Sun County has ever produced. Streets are named after him, and there are quite a few statues, as well as statuettes and figurines adorning the desks of military aficionados. A casual utterance of “thirty-two arrows” is frequently used as a word of caution or a response to someone being too sure of himself.

“Pray, say what is this implement's possible use?”

This saying has several variations, depending on the context and situation. What is confusing is that it can either be used as an affectation or as an honest question. All able-bodied patricians are supposed to help out during communal events, such as holy day festivities, harvest time,

or war. Some take great pride in being part of the shield wall, while others see it as a token duty that one must suffer through with as much grace and as little work as possible. Many farmers and craftsmen are taking the high ground and treating the ignorance of the “seasonal laymen” in good humor, patiently explaining the different usages of a shovel and a rake, but others might take offense and will have to show restraint in assisting the clueless patrician. To be fair, if one isn't used to farm work, using a sickle isn't as easy as it looks, and a pitchfork looks more like a weapon than a tool for carrying hay.

“Who am I, do tell, but son number two?”

To maintain the solidity of power and wealth, inheritance among patricians is either all or nothing; by preference, it goes to the oldest son. Patriarchy doesn't leave much for women, nor does it for the younger sons. Likewise, women use the same statement when complaining about being the second or later daughter but then referring to their lack of good suitors. The saying invokes both loss and acceptance. It can be used in a wide variety of situations, but only if intending insult, in hearing distance of one's parents. Another variation is to refer to oneself as “chattel” or imitate the noise of a domesticated animal to which breeding is important.

CUSTOMS

Constant fear and elusive privacy

There's no sense hiding it; patricians are paranoid. They have so much to lose from radical change that even the smallest fluctuation might bring personal disaster. The more they control, the harder control will be to maintain. No fish seems more dangerous and disrupting than the smallest, slightest one, hovering just outside the widest stretch of the net. This constant fear of “the other,” the enemies from both inside and outside of Sun County, has driven more than one patrician insane over its history.

The drawback of being famous and a figurehead of not just a class but an entire culture is that there's nowhere to hide. A patrician has to behave as if they are always in public. The cost of speaking of private matters in public or showing emotions that betray a particular weakness could potentially be devastating and dangerous. For patricians, the social realm is just as real as the material realm, and a person can be assassinated or annihilated in the former while left alive in the latter.

The only way to escape this extraordinary pressure is to either be or pretend to be completely clueless.



Identity, emptiness, and taking part

Managing to secure positions is part of the power base of old lineage families, but Sun County is small, and there are only so many positions to go around. In times of desperation, some positions are just made up of empty titles. In a bind, even the lower management positions would be an option for a less fortunate family member. However, even these positions have become harder to secure as the emergent and growing townie class competes for the same spots.

It might seem strange to an outsider, especially one from a culture less bound by tradition than Sun County, why the loss of a meaningful professional position might seem like such a personal loss to a patrician. The obvious question is, why not just lean back and enjoy life?

Some who lack useful or marketable skills have little choice but to do just that, but in the eyes of Sun County, the price for doing so is being labeled a good-for-nothing. The stoic working ethos of the Yelmialio cult doesn't excuse anyone, not even the people who no longer have to work for a living. Life without work or a worthy task is seen as empty and pointless. A person without a task will likely question their identity and reason for being alive.

This is why it's not uncommon to see patricians take a great interest in the practical aspects of running their lands. Some have become quite good at it, and it's only by their manner that one could tell them apart from the farmers working on their lands. Others use the cooperation excuse during harvest times or other communal activities, such as holy days, to get involved in temple affairs and businesses. Sometimes, as a great help and a welcome gesture of solidarity, but often enough, just to the despair of the people working there for a living.

Being a minority and living a lifestyle that alienates them from other classes, patricians are often socially isolated. But class interaction in Sun County is much more frequent than one might think. Men have served in the militia together, and women have helped out during harvest times or met during temple rituals. While some upstarts throw all appearances out the window and go for a hedonistic lifestyle, most patricians, especially the ones with a long lineage, actively attempt to break out of their bubble. Not being involved is seen as bad form; not knowing one's staff by name and asking the whereabouts of their families is judged harshly by their peers. One is expected to know one's people, lead them by example, and be a role model for the rest of Sun County society. Paradoxically, the ideal is to manage this while maintaining just enough distance that one's position is clear. This task can be confusing to outsiders and the newly rich, but old-lineage families train their children to walk the thin line between familiar and superior just as easily as breathing.

For the individual, however, it's hard to form close relationships. Any kind of personal connection can be potentially treacherous and dangerous. An entourage must be carefully screened to exclude people who see it as a position to exploit unfairly. Surprisingly enough, some patricians enjoy close friendships with unfortunates, who might share the same interests in physical outdoor activities, such as hunting or rearing animals. Unfortunates aren't likely to put on airs because a person of lineage happens to be around, and some patricians appreciate their brusque and informal nature.

How to cope with superficiality

For the more philosophically inclined among the patrician class, there is a perturbing disconnect between their own lifestyle and the practically oriented farmer-warrior ethos that is valued in the rest of Sun County. Some patricians have adapted by taking a huge interest in estate management or taking on the role of great warrior heroes of Sun County myth by bringing the shield wall abroad. But the existential question remains: are patricians even part of the same reality as the rest of the people? Are their accomplishments their own, or are they built on the backs of the many "faceless" people they have financial and social influence over? Even a person who has worked hard for a social position, such as becoming a Priestess or Rune Lord of a cult, must at some point have to, if not question their own suitability, then at least be able to defend themselves from the unspoken assumption of others that it was earned through connections.

Winning at everything comes with the price that not winning is considered the same as losing. From an outsider's perspective, this can seem ridiculous since a loss for someone belonging to the patrician class, like being moved from one table position to another, would seem insignificant to normal people. Patricians are often seen as petty in that they compete with die-hard seriousness in tasks that seem mundane to people of a lower class. To convince one's plebeian friends that winning at everything is of utmost importance can be a fruitless, if not insulting, pursuit.

Another point of disconnect for patricians comes from the insincerity of everyday rituals. One might wish a good day to a person that one knows is out for one's position or that perhaps even murdered one's favorite uncle. The disconnect makes it often hard for them to understand anyone from a lower class. What is taken for granted is non-existent in their lives. Most often, a person of the lower classes' main response to something that might upset a person of lineage is complete incomprehension.

Infinite freedom and lack of choice

"I'm marrying a woman! Try to stop me!"
 – Joy Goldbreath.

There's a paradox in the common life of the upper class in that they have endless liberties but very little freedom. Arranged marriages are the norm, not the exception, and few people have the luxury of getting married out of love. The patriarchal system is stricter than in other classes, and while exceptions are made according to the norms of the family, they are expected to be rigorously observed in public.

Eccentricity

"I raised a lot of bunnies in my teens. I wanted to breed a super bunny to rule all other bunnies."
 – Joy Goldbreath

One of the most infamous skills of patricians is the ability to excuse bizarre, irrational, or even insane behavior with a much fancier and more acceptable word: eccentricity.

This phenomenon of adults excusing infantile behavior in other adults could best be described as unstigmatized, temporal infantilization of a normally reasonable person. When confronted with eccentric behavior, most people apply the same tolerance a loving parent would have for a troubled child. What's so remarkable about it is that



patricians can put just about anyone into the role of the indulgent parent, whether it suits that person or not. This conduct can, of course, be faked by a ruthless patrician to get out of undesirable situations, and it's a matter of sheer charisma if their bluff will succeed or not.

However, eccentricity isn't about being able to ignore social rules at a whim. Primarily, it's about maintaining the liberty of the elite to act as they wish. But it's also to be the symbol of a culture's great passions without worrying about how they might be regarded. It's not up to the lower classes to understand why a celebrated person does what they do, but to take their behavior in good faith. It's a sign of respect for their position, a humble nod to not having all the facts and thus being unable to truly judge. It's also an acknowledgment that patricians have an important role to play as representatives of Sun County culture. Who can blame them when they go too far or stray away from the expected norm of the commoners?

While the lower classes are more tolerant of odd behavior by their social betters, patricians are less tolerant towards people who are lower in rank. There's only so much a patrician will take from people that he expects to obey him, but on the whole, there's a forgive-and-forget attitude between people of the same rank or towards special loved ones.

Usually, eccentricity takes the form of repeated mannerisms and behavior that have become a force of habit that's hard to break. It can be a life choice that seems odd, a surprising passion, or an interest that is ill-suited to the expectations of a person of their position. If it's harmless enough, most people will either unsee it, accept it or see it as that person's particular charm.

There is, of course, a limit, even to what patricians get away with. People of authority are expected to behave correctly to everyone beneath their ranks. Really bizarre or destructive behavior isn't accepted. Such breaches of conduct might be concealed by a patrician family as well as they can, but when it becomes too obvious, a more drastic solution might be needed before the person damages the family's reputation.

Patronage

Many patrician families offer financial and social support to people working in the fields of culture. This is why it's common to see people from other classes, such as entertainers and artists, eagerly performing or socializing at patrician festivities. The support of culture, the more obscure and intellectual, the better, often becomes a vanity project for well-to-do families, a means for them to display their "cultured" nature and financial strength. As an example, despite the recent shift in morals, sponsorship of Uleria cultists is still common as it doesn't necessarily imply a sexual relationship.



Confidence and ability

One very human way to deal with constant fear is to ignore it. Another to hide it behind a mask of bravado. While overconfidence and self-aggrandizement aren't valued traits of Yelmalian culture, they are quite common among patricians. Most people assume it's just a part of their eccentric nature. A sort of collective madness, either due to the pressure of high responsibilities or a result of doing nothing all day long, depending on who is asked.

As noted earlier, there are few private spheres available for patricians, and it's understandable that if they must present themselves at all times as in public, some odd comments and behavior are to be expected.

Unfortunately for everyone, not just patricians but the people serving them, this self-aggrandizement is not always an empty mask. A well-to-do patrician is trained by experts in their respective fields and is expected to become the best of the best. However, money and training aren't a guarantee of success, no matter what one's lineage or class suggests. Failure to achieve the expected level of skill can be due to a person's inherent lack of talent, but it can just as well be the result of having never been told by anyone just how bad they truly are. Polite manners dictate that one doesn't pay attention to the flaws of patricians. One unsees them and ignores them to the best of one's ability.

Some patricians do manage to reach an excellent level of skill, but nearly all that do have had the wisdom to pay close attention to the behavior and competencies of their entourages and tutors. They've managed to weed out all but a few token yes-sayers or "confidence-men," as they sometimes are called, among them. Confidence-men are usually kept for the sake of tradition, or perhaps, just as their popular nicknames suggest, as morale-boosters when a patrician's self-confidence has taken a turn for the worse after having yet again been bested by their tutor.

A third reason for the seemingly inherent confidence of patricians is that much in their lives just happens to go their way. Normal people, out of deference, fear, or opportunism, go out of their way to let patricians have the best of everything. They hesitate to say no and are sometimes so awestruck by a patrician's imposing manner or position that they either voluntarily or subconsciously downplay their own skill.

Patricians are used to success and don't hesitate to take actions that others would deem reckless. This behavior can often ensure success because no one expected someone to do something that radical. As many warriors have witnessed, aggression and high morale from a feeling of superiority or even invulnerability are often more important factors of military success than individual skill. The same could be said of most non-martial skills, as they are grounded by the same principles of human competition. Many say that crazies and nobles are blessed. Their powers to survive

the direst circumstances are sure signs that noble blood is favored by the gods. Others say it's just a question of good luck and behaving like they are without fear. Nothing is more frightening to a veteran opponent than an amateur who thinks defeat, harm, or even death is impossible.

Elderly

A wise elder patriarch knows when it's time to abdicate or be usurped. The elderly and knowledgeable, who can recite every family-related event, no matter how trivial or boring, are just as with other classes, respected and occasionally feared. Perhaps more so among the patricians, where long memories can be deadly weapons. An old patrician will know where the skeletons are hidden, and the corpses buried. Due to the easy living conditions and access to the best healers available in the nation, the elderly among the patricians reach ages unsurpassed by the rest of Sun County.

Children

To patricians, there's no such thing as childhood. As soon as children can stand up and talk, they are expected to learn, obey, and prioritize their family's needs over their own. Parents can sometimes be quite lax about teaching useful skills and proper behavior to their offspring, and this lack of attention usually happens in families that are content that their safety is so secure that it doesn't matter if sibling number six is of much use or not. In other families, such thinking is dangerous, and every child, no matter how young or distantly related, is seen as an irreplaceable resource.

Violence

Violence is ever present among the patrician class, but nearly all of it is social in nature. There have been cases of dueling and fisticuffs, both among and in between families, but usually, they are not pursued to a deadly outcome. Assassinations, however, do happen but are often masqueraded as accidents. Some patricians are forced to pursue dangerous professional careers, such as exploring distant lands or leading an army. But normally, if there's one person left standing after a battle or an expedition, it's usually the most "important" person, with more people ready to die for them than anyone else. Accidents do happen, however. Thirty-two arrows can, for example, hit just the right target to make the battle end prematurely.

THE TOLERATED FOREIGNERS

Citizens of Sun County see themselves as a homogeneous people, but its ethnic demography is more varied than they would like to admit. While Sun County maintains a solid shield wall against foreigners and only admits those with legitimate business there, a substantial number of people legally visit, settle, and eventually achieve citizenry.

As the Lunar scholar Hortensa Ven Rufelza has pointed out, Sun County is a far younger nation than it claims to be. In her report *The Old-Young Nation, My Years in the Land of Sunshine*, she even goes so far as to call it “a newborn one, resurrected from the carcass of the old.” According to her, Sun County failed its testing of solitude, and what is in place today, she calls Sun County II. Her controversial opinion is that the true source of Sun County’s xenophobia comes from its inability to admit that it failed its trial and that its tradition is built on fabricated false history.

Ven Rufelza claims that the spirit of the country is wounded and that its citizens, buckling under the pressure of maintaining the lie and living with its uncertainties, have compensated by overstating their own importance. The fear of exposure fuels the fear of the foreign, as it spiritually knows that its patriotism and pride aren’t anything more than the posturing of an uninitiated child. Harsh words, indeed, but she speaks from some kind of authority as not only an acclaimed scholar but after having lived in Sun County for nearly a decade when the nation and the Lunar Empire had amicable relations.

One has to consider that, while Ven Rufelza no doubt has a fondness for Sun County, she makes no secret that the nation was at its greatest during the Summer of Love and that the only true way for it to prosper is to embrace Lunar ways. However, she has several important points to make, especially when she compares it to Sartar, which she sees as a nation more secure in its national identity. The most prevalent being that Sun County would, according to her, be less afraid of the foreigner if it embraced its collapse during the Solitude of Testing. Its citizens wouldn’t fear the alien if they were allowed to admit that they were all alien settlers to begin with and that the reverence for the golden lineages and their supposedly fair-haired nature is a thing that has no relevance for the present. Nearly all its citizens are of mixed heritage, and to make the majority of the nation ashamed of their identity is a breeding ground for fear and intolerance.

Whereas Sun County is infamous for its xenophobia and hostility towards foreigners, this antipathy disappears as soon as a foreigner stop being foreign. Citizens seem to have a remarkable capacity to compartmentalize and accept people as long as they adhere to common perceptions and

labels. A foreigner with a valid guest tablet prominently displayed is less threatening than someone who looks and behaves in an alien manner while not clearly labeled as foreign.

The road for a foreigner toward citizenship goes through militia service and culminates with the End of Solitude Rite, as described on page 148. Sun County accepts all initiates of Yelmalo as citizens, and all they need to do is show up for the ritual and take the Shield Wall Oath to be legitimized. Any person who has served at least two years in the militia is offered lay membership and/or initiation into the Yelmalo cult and citizenship as a shield bearer. Note that even lay membership in Yelmalo is optional as long as the individual has done their militia service. If he or she is willing, his or her family will also be offered citizenship through the Ernalda temple. When an individual is put up for citizenry, an official query is put to the Ernalda temple if the family members are capable and willing to support the shield wall and, thus, worthy to enjoy its protection. It’s a formality, and the answer is, in nearly all cases, positive.

BRONZE IMMIGRANTS

Fresh bronze immigrants who have just received their citizenship are undoubtedly still giddy about the sense of community they received from the End of Solitude rite. A sensation that they can renew annually, just like all other citizens. The experiences of adapting to their new country are as varied as the immigrants themselves. Many enjoy an amalgamation of different cultures and find clever ways to navigate the inevitable discrepancies and confusion that their particular mixture will bring. They, and others, see them as valuable, appreciated citizens who, while different in some respects, are all the same in the faceless shield wall. Others might struggle to navigate the challenges of lingering clan and tribe identities and relationships. While the bronze immigrants should, technically speaking, adapt to their class and function in Sun County society and leave their old lives behind, it’s easier said than done when relationship ties are centuries old.

Clan and tribe loyalties aren’t taken into consideration when it comes to legal matters, and they might be hard to explain to a citizen who no longer has any ties to “the old country,” whichever that might be. Nevertheless, quite a few prominent members of Sun County have to do their best to

Player Note: If you’re playing a character from the bronze lineage, you could add passions for Clan and/ or Tribe. Having conflicting interests and loyalties might make for a nuanced character with many potential story hooks.



maintain a truce between the allegiances of clan and tribe with their new citizen identity. Unfortunately, regarding the state, citizenry trumps all other considerations. If citizens choose to put their familial responsibilities before their duties to Sun County, they become vulnerable to accusations of bias, corruption, or even treason.

Most bronze immigrants who still have these ties have found ways to keep everyone happy. Just like citizens who belong to cults other than Yelmadio and Ernalda or have dual memberships in other cults, they have had to make sacrifices in their personal lives to accommodate. However, belonging to two different cultures or cults might bring other advantages, such as a wide net of social relations or access to resources, such as magic, skills, or finances, that might be denied to people with a clear-cut background. That said, most people settle for becoming lay members in good standing rather than juggle double cult duties.

Sadly, the nature of Sun County forces its bronze immigrants to be prudent in their ancestral cultural expression, at least in public. Most people from the bronze lineage have had to make peace with the fact that their friends, co-workers, and even relatives might be less tolerant of them if they do not, at least in public, pay lip service to typical Yelmadio culture. However, the shift between public and private is a mighty transferal that few Yelmadians want to transgress against. Behind closed doors, everyone can finally relax and be themselves.

Example: Liv is a young woman from Sartar, where she, her siblings, and her parents were a Yelmadio and Ernalda household sharing a longhouse with Orlanthe. She is of the Owl clan of the Culbrea Tribe. In Sartar, she was used to belonging to a minority religion that was in some cultural tension with Orlanthe worshippers. It led to some conflicts when she had to stick up for her father and his beliefs in front of her friends, but she could handle it.

Liv, who always felt special in Sartar for having a Yelmadio father, finds it liberating but strange, even a little bit empty, to adapt to her new mainstream status in Sun County. Something intangible has been lost to her, even though she's gained many other things.

One thing she enjoys is having a house of their own and enjoying the privacy it brings; another is not having to watch what she's saying among her friends and distant relatives who are heortling through and through. Her prospects for finding a Yelmadio husband have increased significantly, which is also positive.

She does not like that the dynamic of male and female relationships is more rigid than back home. She thinks that her parents are making too much of the patriarchal customs to demonstrate that they have adapted and become good citizens. Her parents seem stressed and tense, pay a lot more attention to appearances than they used to, and

display their patriotism in embarrassing ways. While she's glad not to have to engage in bragging contests or other competitions with her peers, she also misses how it was no sin to be special or different.

She's also less fond of how her old clan and tribe seem to have even more power in Sun County than they did back home. There are so few of the Owls here, and they make a great deal of their issues with their traditional enemies, Blue Spruce, even over things that would be considered trivial in Sartar. In Sun County, it seems as if her brothers and father are nearly obliged to duel every Blue Spruce they come across. Every family gathering seems to have become a rally for Owls that they must attend faithfully or risk being isolated from the only ones who understand what it is to come to a new and strange land.

SETTLED STRANGERS

Some foreigners have lived in Sun County for so long that they consider it their home, even if they haven't adopted their customs. They might be guest workers or refugees with nowhere else to go, or they might have liked the place and its inhabitants without feeling the need to become citizens. Most have permits or are very good at faking their origins or avoiding the militia. Some live illegally in Sun County and have managed to receive protection from employers who see it as beneficial to help them temporarily but do not encourage them to stay longer than their services are needed. Some have stayed long enough to have children who have been birthed and initiated in Sun County and are now legal citizens. This, in turn, brings the opportunity for citizenship to their parents.

To most people in a precarious situation, like poor guest workers, for example, it leads to a strange situation where the parents become dependent on their children to be able to stay and work in Sun County. Which, in turn, puts the very idea of patriarchy on its head. Children of illegal immigrants might feel like true Sun County citizens, having grown up with the customs of their friends and neighbors, but are finding it hard to properly adapt to patriarchy. To them, being an adult means the opposite of being what their parents are. Some manage to fit their lives around this paradox of respecting and pitying their ancestors simultaneously, but others don't. It can often lead to feelings of alienation and despair that are hard to express in socially appropriate ways. The resulting anxiety can lead to conflict and aggression, and thus further the stereotypical Sun County view of foreigners never being able to let go of their violent, uncivilized nature.

While this sounds bleak, others have no difficulties compartmentalizing the often-opposing demands of their cultures. Some even take great pleasure or acquire personal, financial, and social benefits in being able



to move freely between them. Others take Yelmalian arrogance and distrust in good humor, even using it to bolster their sense of worth. Some manage to have quite a bit of fun by playing up or down to stereotypes just to teach the Yelmalian a lesson or two. Sometimes, it backfires, but there is no denying that the settled strangers permanently affect Sun County society. Just by being there, living in it, and showing that it can be done, no matter what its citizens think, they set an example and change the culture around them. In short, they manage to do what few other people succeed with, forcing the Yelmalian to live with and relate to strangers. While some think the situation will lead to inevitable conflict, others are more optimistic and maintain that it will strengthen Sun County and its shield wall instead of weakening them.

Example: Topa has lived their entire life in Sun County. Topa's parents are both from Prax, but their father was a Sky Gazer spirit society member and has converted his worship of the Sun Daughter to Yelmalio. His sacrifices are accepted at the Yelmalio temple, and as long as he does not speak openly about the Sun Daughter, he is seen as a devout Yelmalian. He has not gone through the End of Solitude Rites to be accepted as a full citizen and often speaks of their life here as being temporary. Their mother still worships Eiritha but is a lay member of Ernalda because of the great community of friends she has found there. Topa grew up in Goldbreath, where their father works as a saddle maker. They live in the poor part of town but are happy there. Most of their neighbors had immigrant roots from far-off and exciting places. Life could be tough sometimes, but people from the neighborhood generally helped each other to make ends meet. Since many of the men in the area had done their service, the militia treated them with respect, even when they had to search their district for runaway bandits.

Topa is split in their regard for the townies of Goldbreath. The crafters are easy to get along with, but some other specialists and intellectuals are harder to reach. They tend to stick to themselves and have a lot of strange customs that one must obey at all times, or they raise complete hell. During Fire Season each year, Topa traveled back to Prax with their mother and siblings. Their father never went, and it was a subject nobody brought up. Toba was always too excited to wonder, eight weeks of living underneath the clear sky or in a tent! It was amazing!

Nevertheless, Topa wouldn't want to move back to live there. They are used to living in a town, being a townie. Topa would feel so limited by having just one language spoken around them, just one point of view. In a town, they can switch perspectives by just walking down a street.

Topa has many friends and speaks five languages: Praxian, New Pelorian, Heortling, Tradetalk, and Firespeech. They already feel a connection with Issaries, and when Topa is old enough for their initiation, they will

join his cult. With their language skills and wide knowledge of different customs, Topa wants to become a diplomat! They often imagine themselves off on adventures to foreign lands, where they present the splendors of the shield wall to people who have never heard of it. Sun County can be isolated and a bit narrow-minded, but it's safe and friendly. No one has ever treated them badly because of their looks or clothing, apart from that one time when Topa went to a party in the sticks. One shouldn't judge an entire country because of that, and in the end, the bad people there surely got what they deserved. Topa can talk rings around just about anyone!

Example: Eyon Like-The-Wind is an impala rider from the nomad Plenty Love clan of Prax. He has spent nearly one year in Sun County as a specialist for the Stablefort militia. He has a prolonged permit as a guest worker. He has never gotten used to wearing the same clothes as the rest of his unit, but he has made an effort and is only wearing a few tokens of his Prax heritage that he feels he won't be able to live without, such as his foci and traditional weaponry.

While there were plenty of cultural mishaps at first, he has become liked by some of the friendlier citizens and tolerated by those who dislike foreigners. His captain is a good leader, and Eyon suspects that she tries to manage the staffing of missions so that he will always have at least one friendly comrade along. Despite some people being hostile and rude, he still enjoys life here. Having left his clan, he has few other alternatives if he wants to keep riding the beast he grew up with. Wearing their strange clothes and paying lip service to their most important customs isn't too hard for him.

Overall, he thinks the citizens are mostly mad but tolerable. A few rotten seeds among them keep calling him names or constantly state that nomads can't be trusted. They try his patience, but there were men like that in his old tribe as well. Too many that were liking war a little too much for his taste. He likes that Sun County isn't picking fights with other tribes and that the clans they do not call clans have no deep-seated grudges in which he has to get involved. As an outsider, he doesn't have to take offense at anything. He has heard that there are warriors of the temple that go off looking for fights, but that is their business. They do it far away, they say, and never bring back bad spirits and enemy revenge.

He's looking forward to applying for full citizenship and perhaps getting a plot of land for herding. It would be a good profession for him in the future, and no one would mind that he prefers sleeping under the stars when it's warm and in a tent when the weather changes for the worse. He doesn't think he will ever be interested in living in a house with a woman of Ernalda. When he's a citizen, he hopes to return to Prax to find a good Eiritha woman he will bring to Sun County as his wife.



NEWCOMERS AND GUESTS

To enter Sun County legally, one must pass through one of its border stations and show a guest pass, traditionally a tablet, but occasionally on paper. One is provided in the Appendix. An experienced Sun County visitor would probably dress and act like a citizen and run into very little xenophobia. A complete newcomer would do well to hang the guest pass around their neck as a clear signal that they are a legitimate foreigner. They will no doubt run into bad people who will take advantage of them or treat them poorly, but they will at least avoid misunderstandings or be chased by the militia for no reason. The militia usually doesn't like chasing people, so they are likelier to treat people better if they don't have to chase them down first. Unfortunately, there are bullies everywhere, and they tend to gravitate towards positions of authority and power.

If one doesn't have a guest pass, one can just approach the border station and inquire within. There is some paperwork, an interview, and a toll declaration for whatever goods are brought along, but the process has been refined over the years, so it goes rather quickly these days. Exotic-looking people and those who look like no-good, violent troublemakers (such as generic adventurers) or who lack appropriate language skills might find that the procedure can take a while. People who turn out to be actual troublemakers who have no legitimate business in Sun County will most likely be turned away. Legitimate business is purely based on how reasonable it is that a person is there to trade, improve relations, work an honest job, use the Pavis road to travel elsewhere, visit friends or relatives, and so forth. A letter from said friend, workplace, town council, or business partner will do wonders in hurrying the application along.

The applications and the guest pass are kept at the border post for up to a season after the last registered exit, after which they are discarded. Copies of them are sent to the Sun Dome, which records all foreign guests and guest workers. Upon leaving Sun County, preferably through the same or another border post, the guest pass is handed in, and a note is made of the person's exit. A copy of that is also sent to the Sun Dome. In low season, copies are sent back to Sun Dome about once a week, but carriers can be dispatched several times a day when there are many visitors. The Sun Dome copies can be kept for up to five years, but in practice, they are destroyed each sacred time unless the holder has been deemed important enough to keep track of their comings and goings.

To enter illegally is much less procedural. One just has to sneak into Sun County and avoid being caught. However, it's a perilous option and will carry grave judicial consequences if apprehended by the militia for whatever reason. The militia on border patrol are vigilant and aggressive in their patrolling. It's a prime spot for citizens

who want a militia posting with plenty of action and drama. If one wants to enter illegally, one must take the fact that the border patrol militia is prepped and ready not just to hunt down illegals but for warfighting against invading hostile forces. Border patrol bases have access to heavy infantry units and light auxiliaries and skirmishers. Generally, they should be considered well-equipped, highly motivated (if not over-zealous), and well-trained. Despite being mostly on foot, they are quite mobile and highly skilled in local area lore, tracking, skirmish, delay, and ambush tactics. Just like normal militia hires specialists, so does the border patrol, and anyone trying to get past them should plan for the eventuality that they might have light cavalry mercenaries working for them.

New citizens of Sun County commonly belong to one of the neighboring cultures, but since Sun County welcomes immigration from family members of established citizens, that doesn't have to be the case. Yelmalian from all over immigrate to Sun County every year.

Being a guest in Sun County is a varied experience. Factors that play a part are, of course, how one behaves and blends in. People who are well-versed in local customs and language are better treated than those who are not. Sadly, appearance also plays a great part in how one is received.

Praxian nomads have a hard time visiting or living in Sun County. The militia might hound and harass them. People will assume they are thieves, bandits, murderers, or worse. Many establishments will offer poor or no service to them. Prices for goods or services are likely to be much higher, at least double, than a citizen would be expected to pay. Misunderstandings are likely to occur; conflicts are heated and likely to escalate for minor reasons. Obvious cultists of associated cults to Yelmalian and Ernalda will be treated respectfully but hardly cordially. They will be tolerated rather than accepted. See the *Cults of Sun County* chapter on page 73 for further information.

Anyone from what in Sun County is considered barbarian countries, like Sartar or the Grazelands, might also be treated less than cordially unless they are overtly Yelmalian. People they meet are curt and unhelpful, offering little or no hospitality. Local roughs and hotheads should be considered hostile, and conflicts will invariably lead to the attention of the militia, which is prejudiced against anyone not looking like a citizen.

Visitors from civilized societies, such as Esrolia, the Lunar Empire, Pavis, and Teshnos, have an easier time. If their passes are in order or displayed prominently, they might even be excused from many minor faux pas regarding local customs, except for the dress code for women. Visitors who speak Heortling with a non-barbaric accent are usually much better treated, even if they happen to dress funny (again, with the exception of nudity).

Lunars are mistrusted by the militia and usually kept under surveillance. Some citizens love them, having fond



memories of the empire's formerly close relations, while others have bad experiences or have bought into the current propaganda. The Love Generation, who had mostly positive memories of the Summer of Love, are usually very appreciative and helpful towards lunar visitors. They might be disappointed, however, if the Lunar guest isn't living up to the expectations of their nostalgic memories.

SLAVES

While slavery in Sun County exists, it is not a common practice compared to some of its surrounding cultures. The unfree has long been an ingrained part of the Lunar Empire, and the Lunar-settled Grantlands to the south have numerous field slaves working their farms. Similarly, Praxian tribes keep groundmen to assist with tasks they consider beneath them. Groundmen are preferably captured outlanders, as they are less prone to escape than native Praxians familiar with the environment. Many Sun County citizens were captured and enslaved during the Solitude of Testing, and the fear of nomad raids is still alive among its populace. Strangely, there is no great moral outrage about slavery among citizens as an opposite to freedom, the way it is for some Orlanthi tribes. Instead, what keeps the numbers of unfree down in Sun County are the ideas of citizenship and unity, as well as the practical implications of the Sun County definition of ownership. The latter implies a care for the tools or animals, which in turn is an investment of time and resources. Though many citizens would find the concept of slavery distasteful, a barbarian practice, most of them just don't see the point. It's simply considered bad economics to keep slaves. A slave would need to be maintained and guarded, while the same person if free, would be assumed to be a much more useful contributor to the common good and a highly motivated part of the shield wall.

Taking a Yelmalian or his wife, which of course is automatically assumed to belong to Ernalda, as slaves are unthinkable affronts to the ideal that Sun County was founded upon.

In fact, by tradition, any Yelmalian slave can seek refuge in Sun County and have their rights defended. During the Solitude of Testing, the temples of Yelmlio were refuges for escaped Yelmalian groundmen, who were hidden and protected while the nomads were still in the area and then adopted into the local community as equals. The slaves freed this way were often grateful for their inclusion and Sun County citizens experienced that their unwillingness to ever be caught again, or to allow anyone else to suffer the same fate, made them ideal fighters, especially against nomad raiders. The tradition has persisted over the centuries, and the occasional Lunar slave has been afforded the same protection. During the time of the Red Count, the

Sun Dome paid purchase prices of lunar slaves in an effort to keep things civil with the red empire, but since Count Solanthos came to power, such generous payments have stopped. He has made it pointedly clear that any former slave turned citizen is under Sun County protection, and that no compensation will be paid. So far, the number of individuals has been low enough that nobody has decided to press the issue.

The majority of slaves within Sun County were brought there during the years of the Red Count, and have, for one reason or another, not been freed since. Imported house slaves were especially popular, enabling patricians and ambitious townies to keep up with Lunar hairstyles, food, and fashion. Fields slaves were procured to take advantage of the sudden agricultural output after the Summer of Love, though some families had always kept a few. There are no official slave markets; instead, slaves are bought in Pavis or at the Pimper's block slave market on the road between Pavis and Dragon Pass. While some rich families of townie and patrician origins, have pushed for debt slavery to be made legal or slavery as punishment for certain crimes, it has never been a popular stance.

That is not to say that Yelmalian can't own slaves, just that the custom is less prevalent among them. With the exception of redsmiths and related occupations, many Lodril initiates in Sun County are slaves. The relationship between Lodril and Yelm is one of subservience, and some of the most prevalent slaveholders in Sun County are patrician families still venerating Yelm. Lodril is the most common cult among the unfree, followed by Dendara, the Seven Mothers, and other, more regional outlander cults. Thus, slaves are outlanders and outside Sun County society, even more so than other unfortunates and non-citizens. Most prefer to unsee them, ignoring their existence as they share neither language nor cult-bonds.

Like Yelmlio above, Ernalda is not a common cult among slaves. The Babeester Gor will not stand for any kind of mistreatment of the Earth cultists she protects and avenges, thus making any de-facto ownership of Ernalda slaves a risky prospect. The same could be said for slaves who follow Eiritha, though, such women are often Praxian groundwomen and, as barbarians, occasionally slip through the Babeester Gor safety-net. The Eiskolli, the patrician family most involved in those industries, makes sure to treat their slaves well to avoid Babeester Gor troubles. Whether Dendara counts as an Earth goddess or as a member of the Sky pantheon depends on the individual Babeester Gor; there is no official statement made by the Sun County cult.

With a society built on mutual loyalty and stoicism, there is less room for an expansive class of the unfree. After all, it is more expensive to feed, keep, and clothe field slaves all year around than pay a handful of unfortunates to help out with the dirtiest jobs during the busy times of the year. Indeed, some might remark that the population of non-

citizens, guest workers, and the unfortunate poor holds a similar position to the unfree and semi-free population of the Lunar heartlands. As expected, this argument is not appreciated by Sun County citizens.

For more discussions on slaves as property, see the chapter on Ownership on page 93.

NON-HUMANS

In most cases, people from other species will face suspicion or hostility. Most beastmen will have a hard time in Sun County due to their perceived savagery, but Ducks are generally seen as civilized and not subject to the same persecution. The same goes for Keets of the distant islands. Feathered strangers are often seen as friends of the Sky, even if they follow different gods.

Newtlings are indigenous to the Zola Fel and predate Sun County itself, but that has not stopped the people of Sun County from treating them as little more than animals. Some still practice the old traditions of hunting Newtlings for sport; the tail is considered a delicacy. The more enlightened acknowledge that newtlings are intelligent beings, just like certain species of giant fish that dwell in the river, but consider them little more than a curiosity occasionally spotted in the swamps or during migration season.

Dragonewts are considered frightening and strange and best avoided. They occasionally travel through Sun County on foot and by barge, and all sane citizens avoid them when they do. It is considered a bad omen for a pregnant woman to encounter dragonewts, and many say that the child might be born left-handed as a result.

Morokanth are generally treated worse than other nomads and met with fierce hostility if they are in the company of herdmen. They have a bad reputation as slavers and are often featured as villains in plays and songs of brave young men out to save their loved ones from the wicked claws of the non-humans.

Trolls are hereditary enemies; a troll would be treated as an invader and attacked on sight. Only a suicidally brave troll would enter Sun County, and it would be hard to think of many reasons why they would want to do so, apart from aggression. A giant would be treated much the same way. Chaos creatures are killed on sight, as are any obvious chaos worshippers.

