

## RACES OF AMSALOM

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# FOREWORD

thought I knew what a half-elf was.

I'd read the manual, you see. A half-elf was like a low-calorie version of an elf, with some of the powers, and a few more class options. He could pass for either, and often did. He was friends with elves and humans alike – in fact, he got along with most races. Everyone liked him, more or less. Even dwarves.

So then this new series comes along, and the lead character is a half-elf. Some guy named Tanis. And ... well, hold on a second. Most people don't like him, at least on sight. He's an outsider to humans, a mixed-blood mongrel to elves. He's in love with an elf, so her brother hates him, and he leaves home. He grows a beard to fit in among humans – and to stand out from elves. He has to fight for every bit of trust he can get. Instead of being both a human and an elf, he's neither.

What the heck was going on?

For me, Dragonlance was an eye-opener: the first time a game I played really challenged the genre's norms. There were elves, yes, but there were different nations of them and they didn't get along. There were dwarves, both hill- and mountain-flavored, and they'd fought a war that nearly wiped out both nations. There were humans, of course, but not just the standard, wandered-in-from-the-Middle-Ages guys I'd always envisioned in fantasy. There were tribes of barbarians similar to native Americans; there were swarthy seafarers descended from an ancient, ruined kingdom; there was an empire like Rome that the gods smashed. Even the Solamnians, with their strict code of knightly honor, were new to me.

And there were the others, too, the kinds I'd never seen before. Instead of halflings, there were kender: a race of light-fingered, irrepressible, frequently irritating thieves—but don't call *them* that. Gnomes who liked to invent things: big, dangerous, impractical things with a tendency to explode. And minotaurs – you could actually play a minotaur as your character, instead of wandering around a maze waiting to be eaten by one!

Plus gully dwarves. Good grief, the gully dwarves.

Even before the magic, the gods, the knightly orders and strange locations, it was the races that drew me into Krynn. For the first time in my young life (I was 12), I saw the different races in a game as people, with different outlooks and philosophies, rather than just attributes and combat bonuses. It's the races that still stand out for me.

Picking a character's race immediately gives you a mindset, and helps you work out how you're going to associate with other characters in the game. If you're a dark elf, you're going to have a much different outlook from a wild Kagonesti or a high-and-mighty Silvanesti. If you're a human from Solamnia, you'll interact with the local peasants much differently than if you're a Qué-shu warrior ... or a kender.

By choosing a race, you're choosing a culture where you're welcome, or at least tolerated. You're picking your friends and your enemies ... at least until you give people a reason of your own to like you (or hate you). It's much more than just deciding whether you have a beard or pointy ears (or both). It's who you are – or, at least, who people think you are.

So read on. If you have a favorite race in Ansalon, you'll find it here: Qualinesti or Neidar, centaur, draconian, Ergothian human or tinker gnome. And, of course, the half-elf. And if you don't have a favorite, you'll have one by the time you're done.

— Chris Pierson

# Chapter 1: Humans

#### he Plainsmen arrived in a body, for they had not been able to agree on a delegate—a bad sign. Riverwind was grimmer and more morose than usual. Goldmoon stood at his side, her face flush with anger. Members of the Plainsmen mingled with the other former slaves but regarded the main body of refugees with a *suspicion that was whole-heartedly returned.*

The refugees were also divided. Elistan came with his group of followers. Hederick arrived with his. Tanis and his friends formed yet another group.

Tanis hoped Elistan's wise counsel would prevail this day, convincing the refugees that they were not safe here. Unfortunately, before Elistan had a chance tospeak, Hederick raised his arms.

"...There are those among us who have been talking of leaving this valley," Hederick was saying. "This valley—that is safe, teeming with game, sheltered from the winter winds, hidden from our enemies—'

"...Some place where humans can reside in peace," Hederick concluded, laying emphasis on that word. "Some place far from those sorts of people known to cause trouble and strife in the world."

Dragons of the Dwarven Depths Margaret Weis & Tracy Hickman

Humans are by far the most populous race on Ansalon. They are also the most adaptive and ambitious, dominating whatever land in which they live through sheer numbers and collective force of will. Much of this stems from a deep-seated desire to experience and accomplish as much as possible during their comparatively brief lives. Being the children of the gods of balance, humans fully embrace the gift of free will. Humans run the gamut from the purest, shining example of good to the most debased, vile specimen of evil, in contrast to the elves and ogres who tend towards either end of the moral spectrum.

Humans can be divided into two distinctly different, yet still physically similar, groups. Civilized humans are the men and women who have chosen towns and cities over the wilderness, while the nomads remain close to nature, living and dying at the whims of the land. Neither group is inherently better than the other, but both look at life in very different ways. Both groups tend to look at the other with disdain; the city dwellers considering their nomadic cousins to be ignorant savages, while the different tribes tend to think of city folk as pampered and weak.

Humans have also developed cultures in other lands beyond the oceans surrounding Ansalon. The three human cultures on the small continent of Ithincarthia, the Tarmak, Damjatt, and Keena, have made new homes on Ansalon's shores through the invitation of Ariakan. Although outwardly quite different from other humans, they are nonetheless a prime example of the varied and diverse nature of humanity.

### A Brief History

According to the folklore of humans, their origins lie with the gods of balance, who set them upon the face of Krynn in the Age of Dreams to stand between the elves of Paladine and the ogres of Takhisis. The last of the three to be created, they were likewise the last race to claim a homeland. The elves had already taken the primal forests of the Elderwild, and the ogres had seized the mighty Khalkist Mountains. Humans, therefore, took the plains and hills that were left. Nevertheless, this mythical land of humanity, known as Mara, had its own riches, and the humans felt blessed.

Of course, nothing can last forever. When the ogres learned of the men and women of Mara, they swept out of their mountains and enslaved them. Humanity was put to work in the mines of the ogres, forced to labor for generations, until the rise of the human slave Eadamm. The property of Governor Igrane, a high ogre of considerable importance among his kind, Eadamm saved the Governor's daughter during a mining accident despite being ordered to leave. This was the turning point in the history of both the ogres and humans; as Igrane learned of human compassion—and free will—Eadamm learned of ogre ambition. Freed by Igrane, who was later forced out of the high ogre empire and fled with his cohorts to avoid reprisals, Eadamm led a successful uprising. Even though he was later captured, publicly tortured, and executed by the vile ogre Jyrbian, Eadamm's inspirational leadership instilled his people with the tools of revolt.

The human tribes of the plains of Mara grew in number as more and more humans shook free from the tyranny of the ogres over the next hundred years. With the collapse of ogre civilization, the elves took their place as Krynn's civilized race; humanity continued to live in barbarism and savagery, albeit emboldened by their memory of slavery. During this time, Reorx took the first of many groups of humans to his mountain forges, teaching them the secrets of metal and stone. Over the course of several generations, these humans became known as the Smiths, the Chosen of Reorx. Their possession of Reorx's great secrets of craft filled them with pride, setting them apart from their uneducated brethren; eventually, this hubris so angered Reorx that in 5000 PC, he cursed them with short stature and an obsession to create to distract them from their vanity.

In 4350 PC, the Graygem was released on Krynn. Reorx's Smiths pursued the erratic gemstone, chasing it across the face of Krynn, capturing it, and then accidentally releasing it again, a progression of Chaos of which all of Ansalon's races tell their own tales. Reorx's Smiths become the dwarves, gnomes, and kender, and many other transformations took place in the path of the Graygem. As this unlocked the world's primal magic, the dragons of Ansalon began to interact with the plains humans, and the first of humanity's arcane traditions began to emerge. The story of the siblings Amero and



Nianki, later known as Karada, takes place at this time; as a result of their interaction with dragons of good and evil, the elves, and the fallen ogres of the Khalkists, humanity learns to build cities and their numbers swell. By the First Dragon War, Karada's tribe had splintered into many smaller tribes and spread out across Ansalon, while Amero's people become the first civilized humans.

Over the course of the next thousand years, as the races of Ansalon grew and encroached upon each other's lands, conflicts continued. The humans fought amongst themselves as often as they fought against the ogres, goblins, elves, and minotaurs; plains tribes warred with each other over precious resources, and the fortified towns rose and fell as warlords and leaders brought together armies to invade and conquer. No nation formed, however, despite the growing move toward forming alliances between tribes, until a horselord nomad named Ackal Ergot came out of the foothills of the Khalkists, fresh from warring against the ogres, to gather the plains people to his banner. He headed westward, seizing territory with the spoils of his ogre victories and swelling the numbers of his army. Finally, after defeating the last of his major opponents in other tribes, the Lord of the Western Hundred faced off against his brother Bazan for supremacy of the united tribes and won.

The newly founded Empire of Ergoth was the first of Ansalon's great human nations. Although Ackal died soon after his coronation, his legacy persevered. His line, occasionally broken by rivals only to rise again from the flames like the Blue Phoenix they revered, continues into the modern era. Ergoth was foremost of the human nations for centuries, although its reach was not as great as its Emperors would have wanted. Wars against the warrior queens of Tarsis, the ongoing problem of barbaric tribes, such as the Dom-Shu in the woodlands at the Empire's border, and the rebellion of Vinas Solamnus kept Ergoth largely in check.

Solamnus, whose Rose Rebellion during the War of Ice Tears led to the creation of the mighty republic of Solamnia, began the next great era of humanity. His Knights of Solamnia eclipsed the Cavaliers of Ergoth as opponents of evil in the world. Alliances with elves and dwarves, and even with the Ergothians, represented a shift from what was once merely an age of bronze and iron to an age of steel. In less than 500 years from Solamnia's founding, many other human nations grew to prominence, and the dominance of Ergoth ended.

The next challenge to human advancement came with the Third Dragon War in 1060 PC. Takhisis's dragons had risen from slumber, and brutal ogre warlords allied with renegade wizards to threaten all of Ansalon, with the Knights of Solamnia at the forefront of the conflict. This was a time of great deeds and heroics, although bards and storytellers later embellished much of it. Takhisis's plot to take over the world was thwarted by Paladine and Huma of Eldor. Huma, astride his beloved silver dragon Heart, confronted Takhisis's mighty five-headed dragon aspect and exacted her oath of banishment. The Dark Queen and all of her wyrms left the mortal realm and would not return for over a thousand years. The Age of Might had begun.

In the wake of the Third Dragon War, a revival of nobility and honor began within the Knights of Solamnia, and their ranks grew. Other nations accepted Knights within their cities, including Kharolis and far Istar. Istar, a small merchant nation slowly becoming a major influence, forged a strong alliance with Solamnia that would usher in hundreds of years of prosperity. Istar's rulers became corrupt, however, and were overthrown by the priesthood; in their place, the Kingpriests were installed as the supreme authority in the Istaran Empire. The currency, trade, and politics of Istar replaced those of other nations, which were slowly absorbed into the Empire under the watchful and beneficial eye of the Kingpriests. Despite occasional border clashes, trade disputes, and nomadic revolts, it was a period of great peace and unity.

Istar's fall began with the growing change in its policies toward other races, the zealots who assumed the mantle of Kingpriest, and the steady decline in equal trade standards with independent nations such as Solamnia and Kharolis. Challenges to the rule of the Kingpriest were met with harsh diplomacy and the sharp end of the sword. With the ascension of Beldinas Pilofiro to the throne, a man whose life was foretold in prophecies, Istar entered its last years. Omens and signs from the gods, ignored by the Kingpriest, warned of a great disaster to strike Ansalon unless Istar reversed its actions. A war with the Orders of High Sorcery resulted in the destruction of two of their towers, the loss of two others, and an enduring rift between wizards and the rest of the world. The Lord Knight of the Rose, Loren Soth of Knightlund, was tasked by the gods to ride to Istar and stop the Kingpriest from challenging the gods for dominance. He failed and was punished; Istar also failed, and the rest of the world was punished likewise.

The Cataclysm was a fiery movement of change for the humans of Ansalon. The widespread geological changes that came about as a result of the impact of the "fiery mountain" upon Istar plunged the continent into plague and ruin. Ergoth, only a shadow of a once great nation, was split in two and separated from the mainland by rushing waters and earthquakes. Solamnia gained a coastline where none was before. Thousands of lives were lost as cities crumbled, fell into the sea, or were consumed by fire and plague. Paranoia, fear, and the absence of the gods made this the Age of Despair, one in which the glorious days and glittering spires of human civilization were over. The nomad humans of Ansalon managed to thrive in the Cataclysm's wake, reliant as they were on the natural world; civilization remained only in small pockets, however, such as Palanthas and a scattering of cities like Haven and now-landlocked Tarsis. Solamnia's aristocracy was overthrown, as the Knights were blamed for the horrors of the Cataclysm and chased from their manors. Most Lord Knights fled to the western islands, leaving Solamnia to the merchants, commoners, and those few nobles who held on to cities like Caergoth and Thelgaard.

In the east, humanity took a decidedly more sinister turn. In response to summons from the Dark Queen, who had retrieved the ruins of Istar's Temple of Light from the Abyss and placed it in the mountains of the Taman Busuk, large numbers of nomadic humans flocked to the Valley of