THE SAGA

The Dunes of Dark Sun, Random West Marches Tables, Passions, and the Swordspyne Mountains!

THE SAGA

December 2024

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i (magination)

The Darkest
of Suns

It's time for that discussion of imagination again, the Appendix i of our creativity, where Dane and Mike discuss what made them the creatives they are. This month, we are discussing Dark Sun, the infamous setting from D&D in the 90s.

Dane:
When we were in high school, we played some fairly vanilla D&D games, and we were happy doing that. But something shifted when Dark Sun came along. You seemed more immersed in world-building than ever before. I think that period was the seed of what eventually became Atheles and SagaBorn.

Would you say that's a fair assessment, and if so, what was it about Dark Sun that drew you in?

Mike:
To set the stage, its best to paint the picture of the time we found Dark Sun. We had played the generic Middle Earth style fantasy game for so long. We played in our own worlds, even if they were heavily influenced by Tolkien, Midkemia, and Dragonlance. Shifting through the shelves at Waldenbooks, I had found Spelljammer. This was the first time we had entered into stranger worlds in our shared gameplay. For all the cheese in Spelljammer, I fell in love with it. It was also when I started stepping up my worldbuilding, my art design, and my campaign development.

The next thing that caught my attention in that little bookstore, was Dark Sun. Or I should say the art of Brom on Dark Sun products. That is why I bought the box set and adventure books. Once I started exploring the world, I just fell in love with it. I ended up crash-landing your Spelljammer crew onto Athas and turning a group of pirates into a group of antiauthoritarian misfits in cool leather armor with wrist razors.

What do you remember from that time wandering the sands?

Dane:
My memories are tinted. I never read the Dark Sun books. My exposure was entirely through your campaign, which I think was a heavily modified version of Dark Sun. What I remember is less about the world itself and more about my experience of playing in it.

Of course, I remember the aesthetic of the world and the interesting experience of exploring it—the Brom art, the desert environment with the copper hues, the rough people, the Kanks and their honey globules, the political maneuvering…all of that made the game fun and engaging.

Brom, Dark Sun Wanderer's Journal,TSR

But what I think about most is how it changed how I thought about gaming. Prior to that campaign, I'd been playing D&D with various friends for years, and my characters were always one-dimensional copies of characters I liked in fantasy books and movies. Several of my characters were various incarnations of the book-version of Conan. I think one was like Dar from The Beastmaster. But for that campaign, starting with Spelljammer, but really coming together in Dark Sun, the world started feeling alive and like something I wanted to try to imagine living in. Suddenly, rather than wanting to be an all-powerful wizard or barbarian, I wanted a character with a personality and human quirks who had been shaped by the life he's lived—so Milentus was born, complete with a complex backstory. I developed him so deeply that he became like my Eternal Champion (before I knew what that was), incarnated differently and shaped by different sets of events in different worlds but fighting for a similar set of values…and not necessarily lofty values…selfish, human ones like wanting to defeat people in fights because that's the best way to practice and master oneself. But ultimately, his existence would always lead to a more just and balanced world.

And the character development wasn't just me—for the first time, we had an entire group coming up with fun characters, each with their own interesting personalities.

And all that was because the world felt alive in a way none of us had experienced.

But again, I don't know how much of that came from Dark Sun and how much came from your developments. I know you weren't just reading from Dark Sun modules—you only used these books and worlds as a starting point before building them into your own thing.
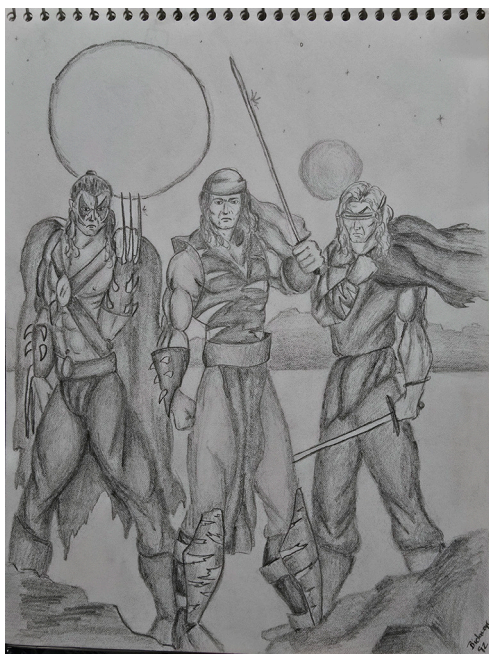
What percentage would you say was Dark Sun versus your creation? Also, you mentioned the art—what was it about the art that drew you in?

Mike:

We got into Dark Sun at the perfect time. We were 16 or 17, and we were starting to become aware of the world around us and the problems it faced. The fairy tales of Middle Earth where the King is Returned and he is totally cool and fair, and the bad guy is always just bad, were no longer the stories I saw reflected in the world. I know you never had that simple of a mindset, but branching out from the standard fantasy at our table just felt right (though we never played at a table right? So should we say sofa top gaming?). We were also into metal and experimental music, and the aesthetic and feel of Dark Sun fit with that.

We were learning that there are things worth fighting for, and sometimes those in power were not the best ones to be in power. Sadly, a lesson that is still unlearned today, 30 years later.

A big part of the setting was that I liked the mysteries of Dark Sun. I didn't change much of

Dark Sun, M Bielaczyc, 1992

the core setting, but I did only reveal the parts that were relevant to how you all wanted to play. At that age, it was hard to wrangle everyone into a room for a night of gaming when we could be at the mall getting into trouble and meeting girls. So I think Dark Sun also became much faster-paced and story-driven than earlier games we played. I I remember correctly, we even stopped rolling dice during this campaign. It's great that Dark Sun is so much like Mad Max because everyone wanted to play like they are on Fury Road. Grab some wrist razors and go crazy!

But seriously, so much of Dark Sun resonated with me, and I happily admit to all the influences it has had on my fiction and design work. Much of it comes out accidentally, but that is the burden of art isn't it? We are constantly influenced by the things that shaped us.

What do you remember about the overall story of our Dark Sun campaign?

Dane:
I don't. Not in the kind of detail it would take to articulate it. I remember our ship, and I remember landing on this world. I remember having a caravan and eating honey globules from the butts of giant ants. I remember a lot of fighting. I remember you making a lot of art with our characters. I remember there being some kind of lofty political goal of liberation or something along those lines. But I don't remember the specifics. Thirty years is a long time for a guy with a terrible memory to begin with!

Mike:
Oh man, you just outed me. Yeah, I totally broke canon and rules for our Dark Sun campaign. Dark Sun was a cut-off world, with no gods, no Planescape, no Spelljammer. And I crash-landed your Spelljammer ship on Athas to strand you guys there in a completely different campaign. I believe I painted the picture of the world well to you all, probably with the high hope that you all would decide to pick up the revolutionary torch and start off against the Sorcerer Kings!

That may be one of the main things people miss about the Dark Sun campaign. Many people point fingers and call it problematic. Kyle Brink, on his "OGL DnD Apology Tour™," said Dark Sun wouldn't be coming back.

> *"I'll be frank here, the Dark Sun setting is problematic in a lot of ways. And that's the main reason we haven't come back to it. We know it's got a huge fan following and we*

have standards today that make it extraordinarily hard to be true to the source material and also meet our ethical and inclusion standards. We know there's love out there for it and god we would love to make those people happy, and also we gotta be responsible." - Kyle Brink

Let's be honest. I believe Dark Sun could come back easily with some small tweaks to the world. Our culture celebrates fiction like Game of Thrones and House of the Dragon, which is filled with very few good people, so we can have a game come out that is gritty and dark. This is not to say that there are many clumsy old ideas in Dark Sun. But there aren't world-breaking. They could be edited to be better. The weird "all halflings are cannibals" could be easily made to not be a "whole culture does this thing." Or the painful elven mate-finding rituals? Just write it off as in-world racist propaganda. The problem is, I don't think a corpo-run, shareholder focused company would want to bother writing a setting where the big bad guys are the power and money hungry kings who sit in their temples and prey on the people who have less. Because they would be supporting a story that might make people start to formulate how to take on their seemingly monstrous, "too big to fail" organizations that thrive when we don't call them out. Not that I think WotC or HasBro is overly successful, but the only reason they get away with all the horrible stuff they do to employees, creators, and artists is because there are 50 years of nostalgia guarding them.

Ok, off my anti-corpo soapbox, but it does drive home the point. Dark Sun was not a celebration of this power-hungry system. It was not pro-slavery. It was not a power trip. It painted those things as disgusting. And it presented a path for those who struggle against it. To work for a better life even when it probably wasn't possible. The odds were stacked against anyone wanting to be a hero in this world. But you grabbed your half-empty water skin, put on your wrist razors, and you went at it like crazy. You tried to tear down the power system.

And the proof of this viewpoint? Read the novels. It was about taking down a tyrant and forming a democracy. It wasn't a desert-themed Gone with the Wind. All the bad stuff was that, bad. And characters were meant to fight for something better. Every day may be a struggle, but still we push to make it better. And that is a great lesson.

It's so funny what WotC calls problematic, while their game system for killing to gain gold and fame in a fantasy capitalist culture with a fetish for kings is totally fine.

Anyway, this is a big theme I have pulled from Dark Sun into the Dark Return and SagaBorn. There is no "Chosen One". There is no

Dark Sun Boxed Set, Brom, TSR.

"Good Side" vs the "Bad Side." It is a complicated world where being a hero is making small steps to make it a better place. It is seeing the world start to fall apart and asking, "What will I do to make it better?"

Not to ramble on too much in one reply, but I missed your question

about the art. That is what initially pulled me in. The cover painting on the box set by Brom stopped me in my tracks. Forever in love with Lord of the Rings, this was something else. Something weirder. What was this creature with two bone pickaxes? Not a single standard trope (well maybe that weird lich guy on the left) from your run-of-the-mill fantasy art. The color palette was perfect. The city in the background? Immediately wanted to go there. Even the logo was top-notch.

Inside, Brom continued to deliver. During that time I liked Baxa's work, but I didn't give it as much credit as I should have. The Brom art showed how I wanted my characters to look. Baxa's art showed how the world looked. The different cities and locales illustrated by Baxa delivered as much to the setting as Brom's work. I also think having only two artists define the look of the setting was a brilliant move. I wonder if they worked in the same TSR studio together so they could work out ideas and style. They built this world as much as Elmore and Parkinson built Dragonlance.

Dane:
You mentioned pulling themes from Dark Sun into Dark Return and SagaBorn, and I've noticed some other overlaps, like ravaging magic. How much of SagaBorn is inspired by Dark Sun? What are your thoughts on the comparisons?

Mike:
I think the only thing that inspired me more than Dark Sun was Lord of the Rings. But the themes I love are all way more in line with Dark Sun than Lord of the Rings. Unlike Tolkien's vision, I see no use

SagaBorn 1.5 Core Rulebook, M Bielaczyc

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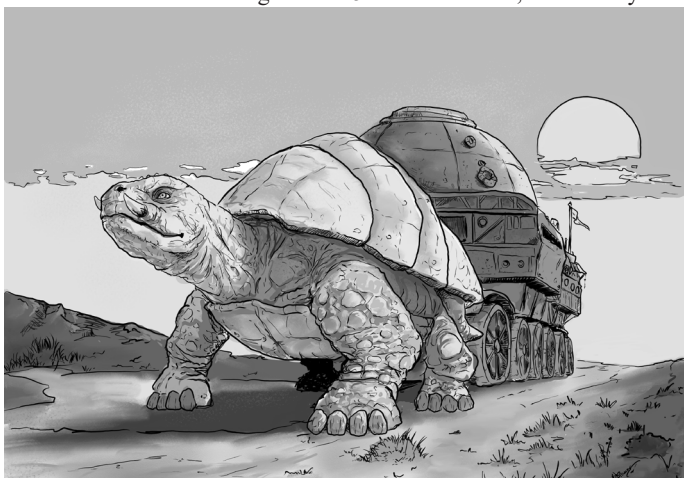
in fantasizing about a perfect person who will return as king to save us from ourselves. Though Tolkien's love of the common man rising up to fix the problems those in power created does resonate with me. Brian Cooksey, who helped with SagaBorn 1st Edition, once said he thought of the Dark Return as the prequel to Dark Sun, and I really like that idea. Dark Sun is fun, but Athas is a dead world. I like the idea of playing in a world that is teetering on the edge. It doesn't feel so depressing. There is still hope.

Other things are influenced by Dark Sun, though sometimes stuff that seems like it is directly inspired actually came about in other ways. In the Dragonlance novels, when Raistlin cast spells, he grew tired the more he cast. I related to that idea, since it only seemed logical that magical energy had to come from somewhere. As I developed the Dark Return setting, we settled on that as a law of magic, the magical energy, or mana, came from somewhere. The wizards of Atheles believe that mana mainly comes from the Navirim, an alternate universe, which is why that universe is falling apart, as well as why it seems to be colliding with the prime plane. It was only a

Brom, TSR

quick jump to ask if people would take energy from themselves or the world around them, so we came up with Warding and Ravaging - ways of taking mana from yourself or from the world around you. I am 100% sure the seeds for that idea came from Dark Sun, but it wasn't a worldbuilding choice to directly lift the defiling from Dark Sun.

I do love the dynamic of Dark Sun with its ancient corrupt rulers, which has definitely informed the political worldbuilding in Dark Return. I do tend to make my rulers a little more human, less completely evil and more driven by being broken people in powerful places.

Another out of the fictional world influence was the way Dark Sun books where presented. The original box set came with a book for players called The Wanderer's Journal. I apparently loved that so much in my youth, that I tucked it away in the corner of my brain and then named our company Lone Wanderer Productions. Then our first big book was a recounting of the elves of Atheles through the eyes of an unreliable narrator traveling the lands. When I started looking through my old Dark Sun boxed set a few years back, I realized how much of their design style I had lifted without knowing it. Now I want to go full in, and put out a beautiful box set like they did, though like TSR, it would probably end up costing us more than it would make.

Dane:
Dark Sun feels so different from most other fantasy settings. That and Spelljammer were my first exposures to fantasy gaming outside of the traditional medieval European-style setting, and I remember imagining all kinds of other possibilities, like my still-unwritten fantasy set in a paleolithic era-style setting, with cave people wielding primitive magic. Was that a similar experience for you? Did it inspire you to explore outside the norms?

Mike:
For me it was natural to move outside of the normal fantasy. Fantasy used to be a lot weirder, then D&D came along and reinforced that euro-centric male dominated fantasy. I don't think I would have ever been happy staying within those boundaries. Fantasy should be weird, and fun, and dangerous. Which describes Dark Sun and Spelljammer!

Dark Sun started development as a tie-in to a TSR war game, and its name was going to be War World. The story I heard was the developers saw a painting Brom had done as a personal project hanging in his studio at TSR. They picked that as the starting point for the new setting. So, the whole tone of Dark Sun came from Brom's very non-standard fantasy art. Where Spelljammer was literally D&D in space, Dark Sun was something new.

The world needs more diverse and strange game settings, so you should get that paleo game setting written up!

Dane:
Do you have any final thoughts?

Mike:
I love Dark Sun. I think it was a really great departure from the normal sword and sorcery we had in 2E . You could totally make it work today and players would have a blast playing in that world with small tweaks. Or, jump into the Dark Return as a setting. A more gothic version of a world being ravaged by magic, and it already comes with a little more modern flavor.

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Codex Dominum: SagaBorn Expanded

Passions are part of the Basic Roleplaying universal system, and I have recently written them into the SagaBorn d100 system. This doesn't mean you can't use them with SagaBorn d20 though!

Passions

A **passion** is a guiding belief or an intense emotion in a hero's life. Passions are intense and define how a hero may act in a situation. These are distinct emotional connections to various entities, groups, places, or even oneself. Love, Hate, Fear, Devotion, and Loyalty are often placed in terrible conflict with one another, as well as challenging personal codes of honor. You start with one Passion. You may gain more Passions through your adventures or by discussing it with your SG.

Following a passion may allow the character to become **inspired**, while going against a passion may cause **despair**.

Basic Passions

The most common passions are described here, though this list is not exhaustive. Like a skill specialty, a parenthesis after a passion indicates that a suitable focus must be chosen.

Devotion (deity)
Devotion to a god or divine force represents a personal devotion of one's life to a deity or some divine force or entity. This indicates a sincere emotional dedication and strong faith. When used for

inspiration, that faith manifests within the character, imbuing them with some small measure of courage.

Fear (type or individual)
Fear is perhaps one of the strongest passions, driving all manner of behavior, for better or worse. Fear can cause an individual to flee from the subject or act irrationally to escape its presence, or it can even cause an adverse reaction.

Common Fears can be focused on a particular group or an individual, such as a former enemy or treacherous relative. Fear cannot be defined towards general concepts or forces, such as 'old age' or 'earthquakes', and is generally not useful when the subject is something any reasonable being would fear, like death. To inspire the character, the subject of the Fear must either be present, or their presence imminent. One cannot be motivated by Fear when the subject is hundreds of kilometers away and shows no sign of arrival. The threat of confronting the subject must be real and immediate.

The resulting behavior from being inspired by Fear can be to aid some form of avoidance, flight, or defense from the subject, or even to spur violent opposition when cornered. At times, though, the gamemaster may ask the player to roll for their Fear passion if the character is embarking on a course of action that would put them into contact with the source of fear.

Hate (group or individual)
Hatred unfortunately motivates many people, whether through racism, bigotry, or based on a particular hatred for a past wrong, real or imagined.

When used for inspiration, Hatred can only be used against a specific subject or type of subjects and does not apply to those allied with the subject of the hatred. Hates can also be aimed at specific people, usually for specific personal reasons.

Honor
Honor is a martial virtue, a personal code of dignity, integrity, and pride. Personal honor is not a slippery issue, subject to interpretation. The difference between honorable action and dishonorable action is clear to everyone, no matter how they behave.

Examples of general dishonorable deeds:

Attacking an unarmed foe	Plundering a holy place of your religion
Cowardice	Treason against your allies
Desertion from battle	Breaking an oath
Refusing to offer mercy when it is deserved	Killing family members
Attacking or stealing from the weak	Killing someone weaker than oneself

Performing these deeds diminishes honor.

Love (group or individual)
Love is an emotional bond or attraction felt by one individual for another individual or group. A character may have many loves.
- Love (family) is a natural emotion common to humankind in any age or culture. One's close family is often the first and most important community one belongs to. Family members are expected to support, protect, and avenge each other.
- Love (individual) indicates a deep feeling and attraction for another person. It usually implies physical and carnal commitment, although it may also include unrequited love.

Loyalty (group or place)
Loyalty is the cornerstone of all of society beyond the family. It is the social bond which members of a community feel for each other. With it, one can call upon that community for support. A character with conflicting loyalties may use their respective Loyalty ratings to determine an appropriate course of action. The player can choose based on the higher Loyalty rating or test them as an opposed roll. Thus, a player can use an opposed roll to determine if their character will obey their hometown loyalty or to an individual if those loyalties are in conflict.
- Loyalty (community) is the measure of the bond a character has with their culture. It typically includes an obligation to avenge slights or injuries against that community or its members. Loyalty (community) is used to gain the support of the community in question.
- Loyalty (location) is the measure of one's willingness to live, fight, and die for a location they feel immense attachment to. This can be a hometown, a city, or even a country.

- Loyalty (individual) is the measure of a character's bond to a specific individual, such as a ruler, boss, or another patron. A warrior owes personal loyalty to their leader; in return, the leader rewards their followers with compensation, support, or other privileges. Loyalty (individual) is also used to gain the personal support of that individual.

Other passions may exist, such as Distrust (individual or group), Respect (individual or group), or Greed, which works like Honor and can spur avaricious behavior. You can work with your players to devise other passions, as desired, but if personality traits are being used, be careful not to overlap too much with those.

Using Passions

Passions define a character's life intentions and serve to inspire them. There are a couple of ways to incorporate passions into gameplay.

When a hero does something that supports their passion, they become **inspired** and gain a Boon to a skill roll relating to it. When they do something that is against their beliefs, they may **despair** and suffer a Bane to a skill roll relating to that. If a player makes a hard choice that supports their hero's passion but may not be the optimal gaming choice, they should be rewarded with a Saga Point.

World of the Dark Return: Passions Tables

Choose or let fate decide:

Table P1

Roll 1d10	Passions
1	Devotion (Diety). *See Table R1*
2-3	Fear (type or individual). Proceed to Table PF1
4-5	Hate (group or individual). Proceed to Table IG1
6	Honor
7-8	Love (group or individual). Proceed to Table IG1
9-10	Loyalty (group or place) Proceed to Table PL1

Fears

Choose or let fate decide:

Table PF1

Roll 1d20	Fears
1	Darkness
2	Fire
3	Water (drowning, being on boats, rivers, etc)
4	Heights
5	Confined Spaces
6	Dying
7	The Dead
8	Storms
9	Rodents
10	Insects
11	Snakes
12	Magic
13	God/Gods
14	Pain
15	Demons/Navirites
16	Horses
17	Underground
18	Birds
19	Being Lost
20	Flying

Individuals and Groups

Choose or let fate decide:

Table IG1

Roll 1d20	Individuals and Groups
1	Family
2	Mother
3	Father
4	Brother
5	Sister
6	Other Family
7	Childhood Friend
8	Family Friend / Acquaintance
9	Boss
10	Lord / Lady
11	King
12	Country
13	Church
14	Institution School
15	Institution Company
16	Institution Group
17	Rival Group
18	Guild
19	Enemy
20	Romantic Partner

Loyalty

Choose or let fate decide:

Table PL1

Roll 1d6	Group or Place
1-2	Community
3-4	Location
5-6	Individual. *Proceed to Table IG1*

Choose or let fate decide:

Table PL2

Roll 1d6	Community
1	Neighborhood
2	City, Town, or Village
3	Church
4	Guild
5-6	Adventuring Group

Choose or let fate decide:

Table PL3

Roll 1d6	Location
1	Neighborhood
2	City, Town, or Village
3	Church
4	Natural Area (Forest, Lake, Mountains, etc.)
5	Country / Kingdom
6	Home

Random Encounter Tables for a West Marches Game

In the August '24 issue, I discussed setting up the hex map. It gives me the overall size, environmental regions, and monster regions. Now, it is time to make my random tables to automate exploration.

Feature Table

A simple table to give me some prompts for visual descriptions.

	Natural Feature
1-2	Standard Terrain
3	Cliff
4	River
5	Chasm
6-7	Creek
8-9	Difficult Terrain
10-11	Path
12	Site

Monster Encounters

The further away from the home base the more likely they are to have an encounter. The first table tells me if there is an encounter and what it is. It can be from the monster region they are currently in or a lesser chance from an adjacent region. There is also a chance of an epic encounter, which slowly increases in chance as they move deeper into the wilds.

%	Near Base
	Encounter Chart
1-75	No Encounter
76-90	Regional Encounter
91-99	Adjoining Region
100	Uber Encounter

	Goblin Region
1-10	Animal Chart
11-15	Easy Demon Chart
16-20	Easy Beast Chart
21-25	Other Peoples
26-35	Goblin Outcasts
36-65	Goblin Scout Party
66-95	Goblin Gatherers
96-99	Goblin Warband
100	Goblin Merchant

	Animal Chart
1-10	Badger (1)
11-20	Bat Swarm (1)
21-30	Black Bear (1d2)
31-42	Boar (1d3)
43-54	Deer (2d4)
55-64	Coyote (2d4)

65-69	Rattlesnake, Giant (1d2)
70-89	Spider (1d8)
90-99	Wolf (1d4)
100	Dire animal (reroll for type)

What are they doing?

I also created a few charts to expand what creatures may be doing when encountered.. It includes things like: sleeping, fishing, wiping blood from their weapons, or chanting in front of a small altar. These cues set up the encounter to be more than combat.

%	Encounter Activity
1-7	Setting up camp
8-15	Surveying
16-23	Scouting
24-29	Eating
30-35	Fighting an enemy
36-40	Fighting an animal
41-45	Arguing
46-49	Playing a game
50-55	Trapped
56-65	Sleeping
66-70	Drinking
71-75	Smoking Varga Leaf
76-80	Harvesting Lumber
81-85	Digging a hole
86-90	Setting up a new lair
91-95	Dressing a kill
96-98	Tending to wounds
99- 100	Bathroom

THE SWORDSPYNE MOUNTAINS

The continent of Atheles is divided in half by the grandiose Swordspyne Mountains. These towering, jagged peaks are the tallest mountains in Atheles and are the source of many stories, mysteries, and lore.

Of note to those who are unfamiliar: while we are all aware of our place here on the continent of Atheles, this history includes use of the elven term Uteria, which is in reference to the whole world, not just the small corner of it we inhabit.

GOD'S AND EARTHQUAKES

In the history book Of Gods and the Elves, written by Thalindar Eryndor, he chronicles the supposed creation of the mountains. This text was translated by Irphazan of Bordon.

"The god wars had devastated the world and the living who still called it home. The Vaahlari, the gods of order, had formed the Union and formulated a plan that would save the world without falling to more violence and death. This last resistance to the onslaught of the Quhdaari, the gods of might, was desperate as Uteria has begun to crumble under the onslaught of constant war. They lured their enemies to believe that they had forged a new destructive weapon, a world-ending power. As the Quhdaari rushed to end this new threat, they were caught in the weapon, a rift torn in space, which ended up trapping all the gods in a limbo that has since been aptly named the Caerdiur, or the Prison in eldar.

This rift was so powerful, that when it closed, it ripped the land in half, and the waters of the surrounding seas flowed into the middle, creating the Ostiana Ocean. This caused massive earthquakes throughout Uteria, the land rippling as if water. The largest earthquake lifted the plains of the west, cracking the crust of the world as the new continent shuttered under the destruction. The plains pushed together, erupting, and the molten earth created the jagged peaks of this mountain range. It was to be first called the Spine of Atheles, the divide of the new continent, but soon, as war broke out again, its jagged peaks, looking like blades piercing the skies, were soon be called the Miekaspyna Mountains, eldar for Sword Spine."

The Eldar and the Valanatians

From the texts of Sylwen Miarithal, translated by Irphazan of Bordon:

"The time after the gods was tumultuous, the lands above wracked by toxic storms and wild winds. The free elves migrated west beyond the mountains, while the eldar settled into the Starless Road, a magically excavated cavern system deep below the surface. As the storms subsided in intensity, the eldar reemerged to the lands above and found the mountains a safe haven and buffer from the less frequent storms.

Long after this, the Valantians, teran people from a long island archipelago in the Ostiana Ocean, landed on Atheles with their massive black boats. They had encountered some eldar

and elves on the sea and had issued forth with a mandate to eliminate the threat to their kingdom. The Valantians took the eastern lands of Atheles and pushed back any other intelligent creatures with their aggressive and ingenious warcraft. The eldar found themselves retreating back to their underground havens, the Valantians settling as far inland as the Swordspynes. There are many tales of what happened to the Valantians, the eldar claiming they had a string of victories over them, while others say a rare disease decimated their populace. They pulled back, left the mainland, and returned back over the sea in their boats. In later years, the elves and eldar who sailed the ocean never found any evidence of their islands or their kingdom besides small black stone ruins on various little islands."

Today, you can still find many of the squat black stone ruins of Valantian settlements, temples, and castles. In the Swordspynes, it seems these ancient places have been better preserved. Finding an old Valantian ruin in the mountains, you can still see their ornate murals and decorative line work on the stone walls of their buildings. A famous Valantian stronghold was named Castle Atheles, built near an ancient Eldar portalstone. The castle sat atop a flat-topped mountain, towering over a large valley. It served as the largest Valantian stronghold on the continent until the fall of their empire. The mountains in the area are still crisscrossed with old Valantian roads, most heading towards the castle.

The Last Years of the Eldar

After the Valanatians disappeared, Uteria seemed to recover from the last vestiges of the imprisonment of the gods. The eldar emerged again from the Starless Roads and began to build settlements and cities. They left the mountains, maybe the remnants of the Valantians bringing harsh memories, or they just rejoiced in the once again fertile world. The eldar empire grew and became stronger. The mountains were left alone for unknown centuries, growing wild and untamed.

There are some old texts about a renegade eldar ruler, called the Crimson King, who built a stronghold in the Swordspynes, but little else is mentioned of him in elven histories.

The eldar empire expanded, and their empress sought control over all of Uteria. They built this empire on the backs of their servants, the elves. When Kaldrath and the elves rose up, the eldar cities were leveled, and their people lost to this world. Some claim that remnants of the civilization fled back to the Swordspynes, finding refuge and freedom under the earth in the Starless Roads.

The Third Age

When we, terans, rose to power on Uteria, we looked to the Sworspyne Mountains as we look at many things as nothing more than a harvesting ground for resources. During the Third Age, the Age of Kingdoms, all the kingdoms dug deep into the mountains for ores, cut down their forests for timber, and took its many rivers and filled them with our waste. When the Great War came and laid waste to these empires, the mountains were once again left to be.

The Fourth Age, Today

The Swordspyne Mountains, the tall jagged peaks visible for an unbelievable distance, have stood as a divide for as long as they have been there. In the north of Atheles, the mountains have always been a natural border between the Northern kingdoms of the East (Uthgard and Tiren) and the West (Endamas and Norhan). The wilds are more untamed than ever. Strange beasts lurk in the old woods and ruins. Tracks of unknown animals or monsters lead up and down overgrown ancient roads. And the old peaks and cliffs still defy easy travel to the other side.

We have started to mine the precious ores from the old tunnels, and the forges of Kowal blaze with fire as they smelt this precious commodity. Ancient trees are brought down to make machines of war for Uthgard. But we must wonder, what shall we disturb as we ransack this old and storied region this time?

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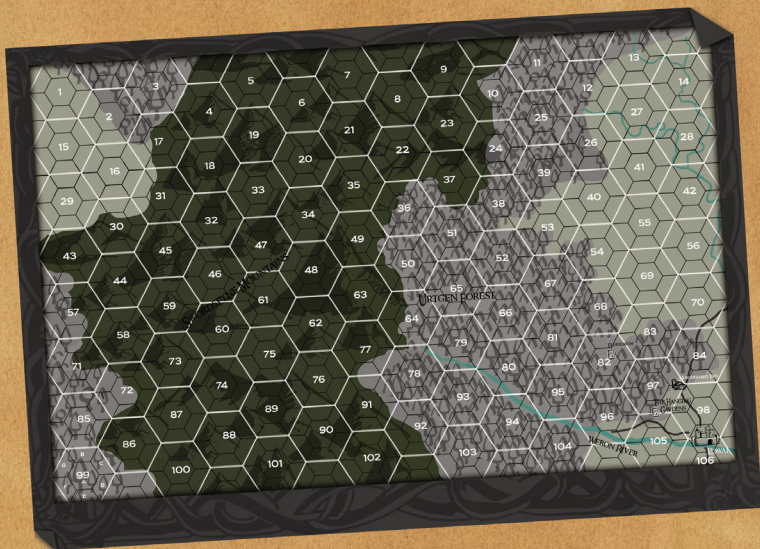
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