

The Empire of New Meritta

A Campaign Setting

Welcome to New Meritta

For eons, kingdoms have risen and fallen on this continent of Onmeneth. Leaders, tyrants, and idealists have created structures that have been built up like shining beacons and crumbled back down to dust. Societies have been immortalized and forgotten. New Meritta has seen power struggles, political battles, and, most frequently, war. Now, in the 311th year of the fourth age of New Meritta, the Empire faces many threats both external and from within. Triton raiding parties have been harrying the coasts of New Meritta for years, stealing goods and supplies and killing soldiers. Assaulting them has proven difficult and both attempts to negotiate thus far have broken down. Internally, all kingdoms have sworn their fealty to the emperor, but as darkness rises in the kingdoms and more monsters threaten the stability of the life the empire has sought to solidify, those with the ambition and will begin to draw their knives. On the other hand, the resurgence of danger has brought about a return of a once noble profession that for the last 300 years has languished. When the world calls for bravery and skill in the face of certain death, well, that's what adventurers are for.

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The Empire of New Meritta

For over 300 years, New Meritta has stood proud under the strength of the leadership of the Empire. It has faced trials and tribulations, true. Civil wars, assassinations, coups. But these moments have led to a stronger empire. The Emperor, at home in the Brass Palace in Mughamar, is the stalwart seat that holds the empire together. They offer leadership and advice, and choose the viscounts that rule the various regions of the empire. In turn, viscounts appoint barons over segments of their region to take care of the people and the land that belong to the emperor. Much of the details of these arrangements are far from the view of the emperor, who has more pressing things to worry about. This has given viscounts and barons more latitude than they have had in a long time, indeed the division between regions is more palpable today than it has been since before the ancient kingdoms bound together to a single purpose. While all fly under the banner of New Meritta, things can be very different from region to region, and weary travellers should always be aware of the dangers that lurk outside well-known lands.

The Emperor, Eloria Shi'Aikar, is one of the shadow elves. She has been serving as Emperor for nearly 30 years. Under her reign, the attacks from the Tritons have become a tangible threat to the empire. When the attacks first began she attempted to take a retinue to meet with the King of the Tritons with an offer of peace and to join the Empire. They spoke briefly and the King told her in no uncertain terms that there would be no surrender. On her second attempt, some ten years later, there had been significant damage done to both sides, but Eloria's wounds ran deeper. She came with a treaty of peace and an intention to sue if it did not work. She never even spoke to the king as assassins tried to kill her and her party. Thankfully, the Emperor's guard, led by Fennik Silverblade, managed to defend the Emperor and thwart the enemy plan. Since then, Emperor Shi'Aikar has taken a much more hands on approach to the fighting. She has managed to staunch the bleeding and seemingly turn the war effort around thanks to her direct intervention. In her absence, however, the regions have experienced an unprecedented level of autonomy, and rumblings are already starting to form on the lips of those who would not want to give it up when the war finally ends.

Ashland

Ruler: Obadiah Maekrix

Capitol: High Basilica of the Celestial Host

It is said that in ancient days the great city that once acted as the heart of Ashland was one of the great wonders of New Meritta, and it was a great tragedy when Mount Mordhein, some two hundred and fifty years ago now, spewed molten stone

from its peaks, causing the great burning. But Ashland is proof of the duality of Hairix, and even when great things are lost to this world, there is beauty in what rises. In modern times, Ashland is bursting with life. Fertile soil let Ashland transform itself to the agricultural epicenter of the kingdom. Some larger trading villages with a focus on shipping and the bazaars and marketplaces now dot the landscape nestled between the farmlands.

The Ashland serves a second major purpose in the empire, as it is also the seat of the great religion of the empire, kept strong over the centuries. The Celestial Host has been tied to the Empire of New Meritta throughout its existence, it serves the will of the empire, and the emperor serves its will. Technically, the Emperor is the divine seat, the highest of the Touched in the eyes of the church. In practice, Emperors do not typically devote themselves to the study of the Celestial Host like the adherents that make their way out of the monasteries and churches do. As such it has become customary for the Emperor to name a viscount to Ashland who doubles as the voice of the church. This viscount takes up residence within the beautiful High Basilica of the Celestial Host, along the eastern shore of Ashland.

Because of this connection to the church, most administration is performed through temples. Head Adherents in temples act as Barons in other lands, administrating and serving the people of Ashland. Borders within the kingdom are more loose than other regions, demarcated by proximity to a temple. Adherents spend as much time settling disputes as they do preaching. Within Ashland, and the many of the lands beyond, they have become arbiters of justice, wielding the authority of the will of the emperor. Their rulings can be appealed to viscount, and again to the emperor, though the number of overturned rulings is incredibly small.

Lord Obadiah Maekrix, Voice of the Celestial Host is a gold half dragonborn who has amassed quite a following in his time in the church. He grew up on the streets of Varina as a homeless orphan. Taken in by a kind old Adherent of the aspect of charity, Obadiah truly came to love and understand the church on a fundamental level. It was not long before he found himself a rising star in the structure of the church, landing at the High Basilica and serving as a clerk to the Voice and preaching as an adherent in the basilica itself. Maekrix's appointment after his predecessor's death was a shrewd political move by the emperor, who may have wished to put someone with a little less conviction in the role, but already Maekrix had been building a groundswell of grassroots support that would have been difficult to fight against. Ultimately, it has seemed to serve the Emperor well, Maekrix has been a loyal servant of the emperor, though he still carries significant clout and has his own vision for the future of the religions in New Meritta.

Eviara

Ruler: Prudence Stoutheart

Capitol: Tionól

Eviara is the most recent region to become part of the New Merittan Empire, though even that was some hundred and forty years passed. Before joining the empire there was a lot of strife between those north of the desert and those who lived south of it. War broke out between the two not long after the complete disappearance of magic. Their struggle ended with a secretive coup that left the emperor beheaded by his general and an agreement for the southlands to join the empire. Since then, the empire has made use of its unique resources while trying to support the people with middling success. In general, the land is populated by the descendants of those who have always lived there. The mountain range that protects the region from the crystal waste has made it only really accessible by ship. Most of Eviara is covered by family groups who hold large tracts of land, however, especially near the coast, traditional cities have been forming. Slowly, Eviara becomes more and more part of the empire, but much of it still clings to the old ways.

Before the empire, the lands of Eviara still knew strife. Family groups would war with one another over access to the animals and plants that grow well beyond the size of the ones back on the main parts of the empire. As such, family life is important to the people of Eviara, even as they have set aside some of their larger grievances to join together as a region. Families live together on their parcels of land, sometimes building several homes as part of the same estate, near in proximity, but with some privacy as well. There is a strong oral tradition passed along by the people of Eviara, and all families have at least one story teller to carry the history of the family through the generations. With the changes in government, these structures have solidified more than anything. Heads of houses became barons of their own family holdings. That said, the emperors have always installed viscounts for Eviara from people they trusted.

Prudence Stoutheart has always had a great deal of loyalty to the emperor. Before they were named viscount, Prudence did a lot of the empire's logistics and they are uniquely familiar with the value Eviara brings to the empire. In addition to the very large creatures, mining operations have unveiled unique stones that were able to generate some magical effect even during the dark times. Even today, most who wield magic do so because they have trained with spellstone early in their magic careers. It is a valuable commodity not only for spellcasters but for smiths as well who seek to craft magical weapons and armor from the arcanically dense material. This has made Prudence's logistical experience very valuable to the empire and they've been able to enrich their region (and themselves) along the way.

Of the families in Eviara, the Diomhair family is closest with the empire. They gave their family holdings, Tionól, to the crown, and have served the emperor directly within those walls since. It has become a defacto seat of power in the region, and Stoutheart has made their headquarters in the ancestral home. A small branch of the family did split off and has caused some trouble from time to time, but the Lost Family as they call themselves have yet to make any real problems for the empire and are largely ignored.

Grey Woods

Ruler: Moira Grimtooth

Capitol: Prosperity

There are few things that harden a group of people like the ever present threat of death and the constant vigilance required to keep not only your family and your regions safe, but indeed the entire empire. And for as long as the empire has stood, the people of Grey Woods have been very hard indeed. Standing stalwart at the northern edge of the empire, connecting to the untamed forest, the people of Grey Woods have experience fighting the horrific monstrous creatures that make their way out of the northlands. Twisted creatures with animalistic features harboring a thirst for destruction and chaos make their homes in the untamed forest. When they turn their attention Southward it is the people of Grey Woods they find. The Imperial Wardens, born and bred from the halls of Mare Glade, the largest military base in the empire, now guard the entirety of the northern border, even into Varina. Under the order of High Marshall Maerifa, the Imperial Wardens are guarding the north border rather than joining the Emperor to fight the Trtton. This has been a point of political tension with the emperor and the region's viscount, Moira Grimtooth, but their orders hold for now.

Moira spends much of her time at Mare Glade, overseeing the training facility and ensuring her people are as successful as they can be; but she must also spend not inconsiderable time in the heart of Ashjar Alaintisar, the great forest, where the capital city, Prosperity, lies. Prosperity is aptly named; the great city is built into the woods around it and has provided lush opportunity not seen in other parts of the empire. The stories say Prosperity was once a city on the outskirts of the forest but that over time the forest swallowed it up. The residents of the city, not concerned by the ever growing forest simply continued to live there and used the forest as protection. Whether that is true or not, the trees of the forest are the backbone of the city now providing structure for buildings and shelter for public gathering places. It has given prosperity a rustic feel despite being one of the most heavily populated and trafficked places in the empire.

For Moira's part, she has always been more of a fighter than a politician. She has done her best to do what she can with the non-military side of Grey Woods, and thankfully for her, the military side is so important it has allowed her to focus her attention on that. The rest of the administration has largely fallen to the wayside or been picked up by the court to handle the affairs. In general, this has worked out okay for the people of Grey Woods, but complaints have been piling up and rumors in the streets are that Moira isn't fit to handle them. Were it not for the emperor's campaign against the Oceankin, she may have intervened and removed Moira, but that hasn't happened yet and Moira is fighting to ensure it doesn't to the best of her meager ability.

Mughamar

Ruler: Devon Hawthorne

Capitol: The Brass Palace

While no one region is the capitol of the New Merittan Empire, there is no denying that Mughamar has made an impressive powerbase for the emperor for hundreds of years. Each region has a space for the emperor to preside in residence when they come to stay, but only the Brass Palace contains the Honor Throne, the majestic seat that resonates as a symbol of the empire. Indeed, the Brass Palace creates a complex political structure for the region that otherwise does not have a lot that it brings to the table. Economically, the region provides little to the empire, mostly consisting of swamp and scrubland. In fact it is one of the largest importers of food from the south and east. The value it does have to the empire is strategic. Surrounded on all sides by other kingdoms and difficult to access from outside the empire the Brass Palace became the Imperial Seat as much for safety of the emperor as for anything else. The Brass Palace has stood stalwart against invasion since before the Blood Moon Accords were signed, and shows no sign of crumbling any time soon.

Mughamar is the most sparsely populated region in the empire, with the majority of the settled area ringing the brass palace and continuing eastward toward Grey Woods and the Ashlands. Still, it has proven to be capable of great political maneuvering. The court of Viscount Devon Hawthorne is said to be the most cutthroat of all the regions, filled with members willing to cross any line to get ahead. For his part, Hawthorne seems to encourage the behavior; his own house is rumored to be in the business of collecting information on political opponents for a fee. Especially with the Emperor away with the war effort, the machinations at play in Mughamar have had a huge impact on the region and beyond. Those with their eyes on the politics of the empire don't take their eyes off Mughamar for too long, lest they miss the signs of what is to come.

Devon Hawthorne has proven, not only in his time as viscount, but in his rise to power, that he is willing to be as ruthless as any when it comes to the great game. As a lower lord, vying for power in the court he accused his own mother of heresy as part of a ploy to become head of a house. She was executed by members of the Scarlet Guard when dozens of books of a heretical nature were found in her home. She claimed to have no knowledge of how they got there, but that was not enough of an excuse for the Scarlet Guard as any might have guessed. For his part, Devon had already been divided from his mother socially and politically, which allowed him to leapfrog his older brother in succession due to how close his brother had been with their mother. Too convenient for most observing from the outside, but still a strong enough claim to cement his position. In the intervening time, Lord Hawthorne has had a number of political rivals challenge him, and all seem to fall to their own vice exposed to the world. Hawthorne now stands as the head of one of the most powerful courts in the world and continues to play the game as fiercely as anyone ever has.

Varina

Ruler: Cuthbert Horton

Capitol: Varina City

Varina is truly one of the wonders of not just the New Merittan empire, but all of Onmeneth. The massive, sprawling city is experiencing a true golden age despite the largely incompetent leadership of the viscount. In no time in the very long and storied history of Varina has the city been as prosperous for all as it has been in the modern era. That is not to say there is no inequality within the walls of the city. Certainly there are those struggling to survive in the twisting cobble stone maze, but the nobility of the city have made it their purpose to outdo one another in making the city the greatest form of itself. There are many who believe that Varina is the oldest city in the world, with some account of the city being referenced before the war of darkness. While she has had her ups and downs the city only seems to have had its fortunes rise since Shadowfall.

The Great Dome at the heart of the city, overlooking the docks district, is the seat of power for Varina. It's beautiful opulence shines like a beacon, bathing the city in glorious light. The biggest noble houses in the city, the Hortons, the Goldenhearts, and the Stonebreakers have split the people into factions, playing off one another. The politics of the nation seem to flow through these three families and at the head of them all, the arrogant and gluttonous Cuthbert Horton sits. Cuthbert has never been a particularly gifted individual in wits or prowess, but he has proven to be an effective figurehead for the three families to make their moves under. Guided by his savvy grandmother, the Dowager Soralea Horton, Cuthbert has managed to make

just enough decisions to push the interests of the kingdom forward without really being in the way of anything real. This arrangement has worked out quite well for Cuthbert who gets to enjoy the finer perks of being viscount without guilt or impunity.

For all the shining light and glamour in the city of Varina there is always a darkness creeping below the surface. The Court of Beggars is an open secret in Varina, keeping the streets controlled and safe from thieves and murderers, but acting well outside the law. Not many facts are known about the court of beggars, but ask any Varinian and they are sure to know a dozen conflicting rumors about the secret organization. While so little may be known about them, it is clear that they have had a palpable and tangible effect on the prosperity of this great city as it continues to push forward the future of the empire.

Varina is the empire's link to the world beyond. Regular trade routes to the exotic lands of Biarna and Cannodel make Varina vital to the ever growing influence of the empire. With the increase in Triton attacks from the sea and the ever increasing strength of the assaults from the untamed forest, protecting the city has become a huge focus of the emperor. Varina has become like a prize jewel collection. Coveted, protected, and the highest value target for one who wished to cause the most amount of harm to the pride of the empire.

Other Locations

Crystal Waste

The ground trembled across the empire when the crystal erupted from the desert sands. The wastes, once home to burgeoning cities in the sand were altered in an instant to an inhospitable nightmare. While some research has been done into the phenomena, the crystals have proven too dangerous to allow for much understanding. A strange energy emits from the protrusions, and that energy has had an odd effect on the area. The fauna of the wastes has changed significantly; hulking scorpion-like creatures with crystal carapace and vultures with razor sharp talons and beaks made of stone. Touched exposed to the crystals do not fare as well. The energy seems to bind the movement of members of the Touched, locking their muscles in place. Crystal forms slowly but the person is dead of starvation long before they are encased in crystal.

Still, adventurers, foolish or brave, find themselves in the wastes frequently. Stories of treasure in the ruins of the cities of the sand or the allure of finding the fabled lost city of Vedis are too great for treasure hunters to ignore. Very few ever return from the waste, but those who do speak of something even more terrifying than the monsters and the crystals. A creeping shadow that claims the waste for

their own. The Shadow of the Waste may be little more than a myth, but it is one more mystery claimed by the sand and crystal.

Deadlands

Located in the southern part of Varina and Mughamar, the deadlands are one of the places of New Meritta best avoided for safety's sake. People who spend time in the deadlands undergo a dark transformation, turning into the dreaded corpsen, people so near to undead they are indistinguishable. The deadlands have been uninhabitable since before the rise of the empire, and the transformation seems to strike any who spend too long in that blighted place.

Still many choose to make their way to the deadlands. Largely ignored by the politics of the lands, the deadlands have a certain autonomy not found anywhere else in the empire. While it is technically imperial land split across two regions, the deadlands govern themselves and are as happily ignored as the regions are to ignore them. For the corpsen, the deadlands nourish them, satiating the hunger they feel on a constant basis otherwise. Even if it weren't for that, they are shunned essentially everywhere else they go, so the corpsen tend to be pretty insular. Still there are secrets hidden away in the deadlands to those brave enough, and willing to give up enough of themselves, to find them.

Demon Isles

Known formally as the "Harper Archipelago", the Demon Isles are a province of the empire, but not a full region. The history between the Demon Isles and the New Merittan Empire has led to a tenuous connection between the two. Early in the imperial days, the armies of the emperor sailed from the southern tip of what is now Varina to the island chain. What they found were islands densely covered in tropical jungle and a culture not geared toward war but with a focus on spirituality and history. Tradition had driven the islands for generations and the more the leaders of the empire learned about these traditions the easier it was to come as friends and allies rather than as conquerors.

Today, a vassal holds the islands, agreeing to bend the knee in support of the emperor for an increased level of autonomy compared to other parts of the empire. Some in the Demon Isles would say they are not part of the empire at all, simply a willing ally. Many others know that the annex of the Demon Isles did not end in bloodshed only because they did not put up a fight. Forria Vision, the current leader of the islands, acts as a conduit and buffer to and for her people to the outside world. She struggles with her interactions with the ever changing empire in the face of a stagnant society on the Demon Isles; yet she seeks to preserve her people's freedom and autonomy while gaining the benefit of membership in the empire where she can.

Sunken Islands

The turtles say a great deal of things, and it can be difficult to parse truth from fiction. One of the things they say is that in the weeks leading to shadowfall the waters around their ancestral homes began to rise. Little by little their homes were being destroyed and they were left to make a choice. Most of the turtles swam south, to the mainland. They travelled through the untamed forest and made a home among the people of New Meritta.

What remains of their home is now under the sea. Like carrion birds, adventurers press their luck to pick the bones of these great towns and cities where they have come to rest; in one of the most dangerous parts of the ocean around New Meritta. Still the thought of great riches left behind as the waters rose is a siren's call for adventurers of all kind, but the turtles have declined any interest in ever returning to their old homes.

Tower of Vorai

The Tower of Vorai is the crowning achievement of the Touched in the last one hundred years. The shimmering spire reaches from the depths of the ocean to the sky high above, a towering thirty stories above sea level. Capable of withstanding violent storms and Triton attacks, the tower has been a symbol of the empire's ingenuity for the two decades since its completion. Very few have been inside the tower, the secretive Silver Mask have made it their headquarters; headed by the tower's creator, Archimedes Silverblade.

Silverblade and the Silver Mask have put a great deal of effort in both the ongoing research of the rising presence of magic in the empire, and in appearing completely invested in their research while they influence regions and whisper in the ears of those with power. What Silverblade is looking to do is truly anyone's guess, but the Tower of Vorai remains an incredibly influential element in many of the highest echelons of the empire.

Untamed Forest

There is no place in all of the empire as dangerous as the untamed forest. Many explorers have attempted to brave the thick overgrowth to try and explore the hidden ruins buried deep within. Few have returned with their lives, and those that have never make the venture again. Deadly creatures of all kinds are described, like nine foot tall lizards who walk like men, and twisted abominations of flesh that seem to blend into the darkness of the forest.

Most are happy to ignore the cursed woods, but many who live in Varina and Grey Woods have no choice but to patrol the borders, protecting the lands from the monstrous creatures that live inside. The Imperial Wardens have largely taken this

task upon themselves while the armies of the empire battle against the Tritons. Rumors still speak of the untold wealth hidden within the borders of the forest, but it takes the right combination of brave and stupid to ever attempt to go after it.

Races

In the myths and legends of New Meritta it is said that the touch of the great Fae Lord gave many of the races of New Meritta their sense of culture and legacy. As such, the people of New Meritta are referred to as the Touched. The Touched have something special that separates them from the animals and the other magical creatures of the world. While they may have the ability to think and speak, most magical creatures are bound to a purpose outside their own control that deny them one of the gifts that the Touched have access to. Autonomy, imagination, empathy, discovery, heritage, and aspiration are the traits that all the Touched share. They are their strengths, and at times, their weaknesses.

The races of New Meritta are varied and the distribution among the regions, with a few exceptions, is pretty even. In general, much of the culture of the people of all races come from their region, family, and religion rather than common ancestry. The increased presence of half-breeds have further muddied the cultural waters, allowing for easy exchange across many cultures that at one point in time may have been a lot more insular. Still, there are some things inherent to being of the Touched that have kept a seed of connection among peoples of like races. This small bit of shared cultural touchstone varies by area as to its overall importance.

Dragonborn

As the children of Hairix, the Dragonborn race was created to be a reflection of all the Touched. They are a mirror to the values and faults of all the races and they carry these burdens well. There is an intensity to most dragonborn, earned from the depth with which they feel connected to their virtues and flaws. Through all of this there has formed a cultural need to stand out amongst a crowd, to excel at one's pursuits and be recognized for such accomplishment. Often dragonborn find themselves in roles of leadership or politicking, with many eyes looking toward them to be the voice that speaks for many. Those that choose the path of adventuring do so seeking glory and adulation for their heroic deeds.

Dwarves

Long have the dwarves of New Meritta been lauded for their unparalleled craftsmanship. History is marked with the incredible works of dwarven made architecture and artifice. Even during the dark days, when magic left the world, there were dwarves able to coax the magics in an artifact out, breathing new power and purpose into it and empowering long dormant relics. It has been a keystone of dwarven culture to honor and remember these pieces, as they honor the craftsmen. Over the centuries the dwarves have accepted more people into their teachings and while dwarves are still some of the best artificers, they do not hold a monopoly on the creation of astounding things. They have, however, built several cultural sites to hold the pieces of dwarven artistry found in the world and those who adventure in the world find themselves searching for more pieces to return home.

Elves

Despite the various kinds of elves that live in the empire they all operate on a single reality. Elves do not age as other species do. Indeed there are some elves in New Meritta alive since the days of the blade war and beyond. Unless they are killed by external means, an elf will not die due to age or frailty. As such, so much of their culture has been lost to the fading. As memory began to fail the world, there was a scrambling to preserve the pieces of the elven culture most threatened. Now, with the fading taking all but the most recent eighty years or so, things not committed to writing are lost and it is unknown just how much of the history of the elves is gone. Many elves leave their home to try and discover fragments of what they have lost in hope of passing them on to future generations to come.

Gnomes

Of all the races of New Meritta the gnomes are the most prone to adventuring. Embedded deep within their culture is a fear of stagnation, and missing the journey they crave. For the gnomes, the journey of a life is the value of it. The stories a gnome gathers are a mark of the life they have led; they are for the gnome themselves, not for sharing, though they are happy to do that too. It is because of this that most gnomes are less affected by the fading of memory than their long-lived companions. Instead they seek adventure for adventure's sake and live happily with the stories they hold onto.

Goblins

It has been a long road for goblin in the Empire. For centuries goblins have been looked down upon when not ignored. Certainly some goblins have found their way

into the upper reaches of society, even so far as emperor for a time when Fizilbix first took the crown some hundred and forty years ago, but that is not the norm for any of the goblin folk. Most must turn to the underground crime syndicates for any sort of recognition or value. It does not help that wild packs of goblins still hunt in Grey Woods and in the Untamed Forest, straining relations between goblins and the other races. When a goblin goes adventuring into the world, they do so to prove that overlooking goblin kin is done at your own risk.

Goliath

For generations the Goliath people lived in the footholds of what is now Eviara. Very few ever left their protected lands near the Vellenthia Ridge except those that faced exile. Even today, the Goliath are one of the few races that are not quite so integrated across New Meritta. While most in the empire are aware of them, they are not common and are often treated as outsiders when they make their way to the northlands. Those who travel now do so to understand the empire and the world their kind has shunned for so long. They seek answers to questions not found in Eviara. Leaving the family is a permanent act for a goliath, so those who make that choice seldom do so without reason and are not eager to return.

Halflings

By and large, halflings lead slower paced lives than the rest of the empire. They do poorly with the politics of the regions and instead focus on the pleasures they have in life from a hard day's work, a quaint home to return to, and great stories to tell one another while they sit by the hearth. They sing the songs of great things of the past. Of swords and magics and dragons and gods. They speak of Angels and Shadows and Kings and power. They tell their stories with reverence and they tell them over and over until each of them knows the beats and swells of the story in their soul. This is when the dread for many halflings set in. When the stories are told and retold and there is nothing left to say, that is when some intrepid halflings gather their courage and begrudgingly face the world to gather new stories to share.

Humans

Humans are ubiquitous across the empire. Even the southlands have had an influx of humans since joining the empire and they have gone from an oddity to commonplace quickly. Not only have humans spread across all of New Meritta, they are also incredibly varied. Especially with the large number of crossbred races, human culture has both been absorbed into other cultures or overwritten by those cultures feeding back their traditions and attitudes. One thing about humans that is

utterly irreplaceable is their curiosity. Humans seem to have a voracious appetite for figuring out as much as they can in their short lives and achieve great things in their eighty or so years. Indeed, most human adventures begin by seeking the unknown and let the spirit of discovery fill them on their journeys.

Orcs

The orc tribes of New Meritta have found a true place in the empire. Likely due to how early they crossbred with humans, orcs have become an increasing part of the fabric of society in the empire and are no longer pushed to the periphery. Orc culture reveres their ancient ancestors whose souls have been preserved as the orkish gods. These spiritual remnants offer a glimpse at some of the greatest orcs throughout history from the moment that they passed. They offer wisdom and guidance, but they cannot retain what they learn of the world, acting more as a moral guidepost than actual advisors. Many orcs who seek adventure do so on quests granted by orc gods, or to find their own glory that could allow them to attain godhood.

Tiefling

Since the Demon Isles became connected to the New Merittan Empire more and more of the Demonfolk have made their way to the northlands. Being small islands the demon isles offer different opportunities than one might find in some of the bigger cities of the empire and the working relationship has opened up new avenues for trade and information. Tieflings seek to live up to their virtue name and find new ways to connect to their virtue in the larger world. Tieflings who adventure in the world do so seeking honor and fulfilling their virtue, or they seek to find opportunity for their family, which plays an important part in tiefling culture.

Tortollan

Tortollans have grown a strange relationship with New Meritta. For the most part, they tend to be nomadic, travelling in small groups of Tortollan across the empire. The groups tend to be variable, and if they meet another band of Tortollan they will mix for a while then go about their way, typically in a different configuration than before. Tortollans do their best to pass on the stories of their ancestors, but the fading struck them severely, leaving their memories brittle and frail. Unlike the elves, whose memories seem clouded, a tortollan can usually remember a thing once before it crumbles away; like trying to recall a dream. The tortollan travel all the time now, selling wares and working trades to get by. Those who adventure seek the means to survive in a land that does not belong to them and to chase the

ancient legends of their people, including the stories of the sunken cities north of the continent.

Triton

The Tritons have been at war with the New Merittan Empire for over just over 30 years. Despite multiple attempts to engage in peace talks, the Tritons have been unwilling to speak with those of the surface. Very little is known about the beings, though there are stories that say they once interacted without hostility with those who lived above the ocean.

Players may not make triton characters.

Racial Modifiers

Half

Restriction: Players may not take the half modifier if they are Human or Tiefling.

Being a half-breed means you have both humans and another race in your lineage. Many half-breeds struggle to understand their true place in the world. Sometimes viewed as not human enough by humans and too human by non-humans. Some races adapt better to half-breeds than others. For elves and orcs it has been so ingrained for so long that they are truly part of the culture. For many of the others half-breeds are newer or rarer and there has been some adjustment to their presence in the culture.

Still there are many half-breeds who find great value in their heritage. They are a bridge between cultures and create bonds that move society forward. In a lot of ways being a half-breed prepares you for dealing with people inside and outside your cultural background.

Any race may mix with human to create half-breeds except for Tieflings. While there is not a known reason why Tieflings are not capable of breeding with humans, there are myriad theories on why that may be.

When you select this modifier to your race reduce your highest racial stat bonus by one and increase your charisma bonus by one instead. Additionally, you may choose a skill to be proficient in. Keep in mind that half-breeds carry in game consequences both positive and negative.

Vampyr

Restriction: A player cannot take the Vampyr and Corpsen modifiers at the same time.

There is much in common between the vampyr and the creatures of darkness, the vampires. Both have an aversion to sunlight, feast on the essence of mortals by extracting their blood, and have undergone a great personal change to become what they have become. There is, however, one massive difference between the two; vampyr are alive. The vampyr retain their connection to the other Touched, not surrendering their freewill to the corruption that vampires have given themselves to. Many researchers around New Meritta have struggled to explain the true difference between vampyr and vampires, but there are a few things that are absolutely known.

Vampyr are made, not born. If a vampyr procreates, their offspring will not carry the transformation, even if they mate with another vampyr. All vampyr are made by a bite from another vampyr or a vampire. This is also true of vampires, but the rituals and process involved in turning someone into a vampire is very different.

Turning someone into a vampyr is not guaranteed. There does not appear to be a clear indication of why some people who are fed upon undergo the transformation to vampyr. What's more, there have been people who have only become vampyr after multiple exposures, indicating the factors involved can change over time. Some have claimed to discover the methods by which to guarantee one does, or does not, become a vampyr but no one has been able to prove such assertions.

Vampyr are alive. They have blood, they can be killed, and if left alone they will die of old age just as they would have had they never changed. Whatever race they were before the transformation they are fundamentally that race. This has been difficult for many to accept, but since the Blood Moon Accords and the ability for vampyr to be more open, there has been some understanding. Vampyr are still often met with fear and sometimes hatred, but that feeling is lessening as time goes on.

Vampyr show some physical characteristics from the transformation, though they typically are not as easy to spot as they are with vampires. Vampyr have fangs that have grown to allow them to access blood. They are typically paler skinned than they were before the transformation and their eyes typically change to a purple or amber color.

When you select this modifier to your race you add the Sun Sickness feature to your character as well as the Sustained by Blood feature.

Sun Sickness - *When you are uncovered or unprotected in direct sunlight you feel a part of you burning away. You have disadvantage on all checks. A character*

properly outfitted with full body coverage clothing or some other method of keeping the sun directly off them will not suffer these effects.

Sustained by Blood - *You do not need to eat or drink to survive. You do, however, need to consume the blood of another living non-vampyr creature. When you feed you consume about a pint of blood. The creature you fed off of will take a level of exhaustion until they have a short rest. If you consume the blood of a creature not of the Touched to feed, you will be satiated for twenty four hours. If you consume the blood of a member of the Touched you will be satiated for seven days. When you are not satiated, you are considered hungry. While hungry, your compulsion to feed will grow stronger over a twenty four hour period. At the end of that time period you will become starving. When you become starving you take a level of exhaustion, and an additional level of exhaustion every eight hours until you feed.*

Corpsen

Restriction: One cannot take the Vampyr and Corpsen modifiers at the same time.

The deadlands were born of the undead, and the corpsen are born of the deadlands. The transformation of the corpsen strikes those who spend time within the blighted place, morphing them into the living undead. Unlike actual undead, the corpsen are still living creatures, though their biology changes significantly when the transformation occurs, especially within the deadlands. While in the deadlands, corpsen do not need to eat or drink and they age more slowly than they would otherwise. Outside the body begins to age again and a hunger for flesh arises in the corpsen.

In society outside of the deadlands, corpsen are rare and feared. Many choose to disguise themselves around non-corpsen as a means of protection. The appearance of a corpsen is very similar to other undead, causing understandable panic in those who do not know better. This is why most corpsen choose to remain in the deadlands. While the effects of the deadlands are known, many still choose to go there because of the freedom afforded. Children born in the deadlands are typically born corpsen.

When you select this modifier to your race you add the Pretty Much Dead feature, Hunger for Flesh feature, and the Deadlands Denizen feature to your character.

Pretty Much Dead - *You do not need to eat, drink or breathe.*

Hunger for Flesh - *You are always hungry and craving warm flesh. Even when you are consuming flesh, you are never sated, the hunger remains. When you consume a complete corpse, gain a number of temporary hit points equal to your constitution modifier for one hour. Consuming another corpse refreshes the ability but does not stack.*

Deadlands Denizen - While you are in the deadlands Hunger for Flesh is suppressed and you gain temporary hit points equal to your constitution modifier that refresh with a short rest. You do not age.

Factions

Across the New Merittan Empire the Touched are drawn together by something beyond the circumstances of their life. People with like interests find each other across regional lines and beyond cultural barriers. These people have joined together and created organizations that now hold clout within the structure of New Meritta itself. Many of these groups have taken up causes for which they find important while others are simply a way for Touched to find other Touched with which to share their understanding.

Artificer's Guild

During the dark days, when magic had left New Meritta, so much had to change. Magic had been a huge part of people's lives and for it to be gone suddenly changed so much of New Merittan culture. Over time, the greatest artificers in the empire discovered that they could take old items of power and still rempower them or change their magic, despite the lack of magic in the world. They could not enchant items from scratch, but they could manipulate those that had once been enchanted. Artificers capable of such things became very powerful, and these items of power became hot commodities. Indeed wars were fought over them, including the twenty-year pedant war.

As the demand on these artificers grew the old craftsman guild became highly focused on the artificers, ensuring they were taken care of. Before long, the guild became exclusive to taking care of the artificers and was able to pick up considerable influence in the empire. When the dark days ended and magic began to trickle back into the world, it looked like there was going to be some waning of the power the guild was able to wield, but when the first new artifacts of power were created the guild swooped in to ensure that they had full control over the creation and sale of such objects. They have done everything in their power to maintain that control.

Black Scale

The Black Scale is dedicated to the collection and preservation of history; additionally they seek to understand history as a lens by which to better understand our world. The Black Scale started as a small research and scribing group to serve the emperor in the early days of the empire. Over time it grew in power and

absorbed several other libraries and research groups until it was the largest group in all of New Meritta.

In recent times the Black Scale has had two special interest foci. Since the return of magic to the world they have become the foremost experts in divination in the empire, becoming the emperor's eyes to the future. The rituals being developed pale in comparison to the ones spoken of in legend, but as research continues more secrets of divination are being uncovered. Additionally, they have put considerable resources into finding a cure to the fading. The loss of memory and knowledge some of which dates back thousands of years, has been devastating to the empire. Many of the oldest members of the Black Scale were severely affected and it has become a very passionate quest of the organization.

Court of Beggars

The Court of Beggars is largely a Varina based operation, but as they operate extra-legally, they don't really answer to any of the viscounts when it comes to their operations. Agents of the court are all over the kingdoms. Finding out their goals and intentions is difficult, not only must one know the right people to talk to but they have to penetrate the levels of subterfuge inside the organization. That means that there are a hundred different versions of what the court of beggars are and what influence they have, but there is an undeniable link between the Court of Beggars and the underprivileged in Varina and the empire at large.

While many politicians and leaders deny the existence of the Court of Beggars, they are an open secret and the influence they have has put them in a powerful position. Through that position they have the means to prove themselves valuable in other ways, with networks that connect to those willing to do many jobs that most others won't take. That connection is always handled by agents of the Court, however, to protect everyone involved.

Commission Legion

The Commission Legion is one of the larger organizations, but has some of the least influence in the empire. During the dark times, as the need for adventurers began to wane, the people with that particular skill set began to seek other kinds of work. Bodyguards and mercenaries became of greater import, especially as people sought to protect what few remnants of magic they could find. The coup of 270, 4th Age was won on the backs of mercenaries that made up a bulk of the army representing the southlands. As the need progressed, competition between groups became cutthroat and many were killed in the name of a little more coin. The Commission Legion was founded by Emperor Maghda Bronzecore to facilitate the hiring of mercenary forces. It regulates the price and requires all contracts be formalized

through the legion's process. "Private deals" still happen from time to time, but they still must pass through the legion.

This solution, while lasting, has not been without its own turmoil. At first, it solved many problems, but over time it opened itself up to new types of corruption. Prices went up, but the fees being paid to the mercenaries stayed largely the same. Paying for access to higher end contracts was not permitted but still widespread. Some groups would simply poach jobs from other groups and claim the fee for themselves. The real troubles for the legion started when magic returned to the world. There was still a need for soldiers and guards, but the lure of adventuring outside the control of the legion was a call many could not deny. As the work dried up, there were many accusations of unfair disbursement of those contracts. The Commission Legion is largely diminished from what it once was, but still has more active members than any of the other organizations (though their exact number is often hidden), but as all power in politics is future power, their strength has begun to fail.

Guild of Contractual Arrangement

Created by the first emperor of New Meritta, the Guild of Contractual Arrangement claims to hold no political position of any kind. Largely they exist to officialize agreements and contracts across the empire, but they also codify laws and decrees laid out by the viscounts and emperors. Oftentimes members of the guild are called in to interpret or adjudicate contracts for those who would stand judgement of others. While they have claimed impartiality, one would be foolish to believe that there hasn't been some lobbying behind closed doors about what will and will not be codified when a vague decree has come down from a viscount. It would also be naive to believe that some guild members have not been incentivized to interpret certain contracts in interesting ways.

Many guild members make a living travelling from village to village. They move into town, spend the day notarizing documents for the townsfolk, and move on for the next village, usually staying only a night or two. It's a good life for scribes who wish to see the world, but it can be solitary and lonely. Some guild members have attached themselves to the Mendicants, moving into the same towns they move through. Still others have set up shops in cities large enough to have constant stationary business. The guild headquarters, in Southern Varina, outside the city, has copies of all the contracts that have ever been notarized. Acquiring the information can be costly and time consuming, but the guild prides itself on the completeness of its records.

Imperial Wardens

The greatest warriors and soldiers in the empire train at Mare Glade as part of the imperial army. The greatest among the imperial army get drafted to the Imperial Wardens. High Marshall Maerifa is given significant autonomy to sculpt their regiment as they wish, and more autonomy than any other military leader in the use of their troops. The Wardens have a moral ethos they adhere to strictly and have on several occasions refused to take missions. Through the years some viscounts have tried to apply pressure to the wardens but ultimately have been forced to acquiesce. Maerifa is hard as steel and has a reputation for not being willing to give an inch. But they are also good at getting results. During the war with the southlands the Imperial Wardens were the hard line that kept the southlanders from invading the northlands, thwarting multiple attempts by holding the entirety of the southern coast (of course when the coup came from more unconventional means there were no troops to stop it).

Now, along the northern edge of the empire, the Imperial Wardens seem to fight an unending war against the creatures of darkness. The Emperor has tried on multiple occasions to get them reassigned to the front lines of the war with the tritons, but Maerifa still holds much influence in Grey Woods and so far the Emperor has not been able to get them to budge. High Marshall Maerifa is a figure that has caused much political consternation. They have the loyalty of the wardens, and a level of conviction that lends them an unimpeachable quality that makes interacting with their idealism infuriating.

Scarlet Guard

Long has the Celestial Host been associated with order throughout the empire. Adherents of the Celestial Host are trusted members of their communities and travelling adherents receive a level of respect and reverence connected to their position. This reputation and service role are important to the church and something they have fought very hard to maintain; but adherents are still only people, prone to mistakes and errors of judgement. From the church of Murkas, the Scarlet Guard was born. Originally the guard was created to deal with issues that had cropped up amongst the adherents, and they became very good at routing out those issues and dealing with them discreetly and definitively. Over time, their scope expanded until they were in charge of seeking out and ending acts of heresy within the church.

The Celestial Host is by far the most influential religion in the empire, and the Scarlet Guard know it. They have often applied pressure, especially in Ashland, but across the empire, to create laws that grant them authority and enable their techniques for searching out heretics. Largely they have been successful, though

they have had the least reach into the Varina. They were making great progress there, reforming many of the less desirable cultural touchstones of Varina, when the enlightening started to gain prominence. Its existence threatened the Scarlet Guard significantly, and they have been very focused on trying to stomp the idea out.

Silver Mask

When magic first returned to the world there was fear and uncertainty. Rumors ripped through villages of strange powers coming back into the world. Fear rose of monsters and creatures of darkness coming back as well. Stories said that after the heroes of old ended the shadowfall magic slowly drained from the world. Would it's return signal a new shadowfall? Best to find those with powers and snuff them out before they cause real trouble. Towns would gather together only to find that the person who was rumored to have these strange powers was gone, never to be seen again. The Silver Mask had come for those with powers, gathering them up, keeping them safe, and stretching the magic to its very limits. Before long, the group was sanctioned by the empire, viewed by some as a safe-haven to understand more about the return of magic, for others a leper colony to keep the darkness away.

As time has passed, magic has come back more and more; it's nearly commonplace, as it was in the old days. The Silver Mask has only grown in strength. Referred to by many as the Arcanists Guild, they are headquartered in the distant Tower of Vorai, where the archmage Archimedes Silverblade still collects some promising mages to continue research within the tower, but far more attention is paid to influencing the courts on the use of magic within their realms. Too many people have the gifts now for the Silver Mask to collect them all, and so their secrets are reserved for the few who meet their unknowable criteria.

Other Groups

Adventure Incorporated

Adventuring in New Meritta is once again on the rise. Over the last three hundred years, since Shadowfall, adventuring has been a dying artform. As the monsters of darkness receded, the need for those daring and adventures to slay them disappeared. As magic left the world the world didn't need delving into dangerous temples and dungeons of old. But then magic came back; and with it has come exactly the kinds of things Adventure Incorporated used to be the best at.

In the old days there were hundreds of adventuring companies. As work dwindled they all fell away, unable to maintain the fees and licensure from the empire to remain in business during the dark times. Adventure Incorporated endured. Ancient laws from the first emperor made Adventure Incorporated exempt from the adventuring fees (much to the chagrin of those who would try to compete with them) and has made Adventure Incorporated a mainstay of the empire. Still, as the magic flooded the world and work began anew, it did not take long for the competition to catch up and even surpass Adventure Incorporated. While it is still a known name in adventuring, there are many outfits larger than Adventure Incorporated, notably the Hero Syndicate.

Mendicant Savants

Travelling the roads of the empire can be dangerous. Cutthroats, brigands, monsters, and more stalk the dark roadways across all the regions. Travel from village to village is rare, let alone between regions. And yet, the Mendicant Savants travel. Many stories exist about the savants, both good and bad; as people will always fear strangers. What can be guaranteed is that the mendicants are travellers, large families travelling by caravan from village to village. When they arrive, they set up a camp on the outskirts. During the day they set up food stalls and sell wares from around the empire. At night, they put on shows and play music to entertain the village.

Mendicants are typically revered for the news they bring, the entertainment, and the quality of their wares; but those dark stories still persist. The featureless white masks with the upturned or downturned mouth on each of them breeds distrust with locals, who are likely to blame every accident and missing item on the travelling folks for days after they leave. Sometimes young adults will join up with the Savants as they travel, and the travelling folk get blamed for that as well. They seem to weather it all in good spirits though, as the mendicants travel along, telling their stories, selling their wares, and keeping their secrets.

Order of Pure Elements

The traditions of the Order of Pure Elements have protected New Meritta for millenia. The realms of fire, water, earth and air are close to the prime plane of New Meritta and sometimes creatures and beings from those places find a way to breach the divide into our world. The Order has always sought to correct these anomalies. By the mandate of the elemental blade, an ancient weapon of legend that can strike it's foes with all of the elements, the order protects the empire from such incursions, but has removed itself from the politics of the land almost completely.

Several times over the years emperors have attempted to bring them into the empire proper. They have always refused, but assured the emperors they would do their duty no matter what. Some emperors took more kindly to the refusal than others and for added assurance many of the monasteries have moved to lands outside the confines of the empire. Many of the monasteries now lay in the far northern mountains, on the other side of the untamed forest, near the Scar of the World. Others moved south, along the ridges of the Crystal Waste, though they do not tread into the sands. Despite these moves, many of the members of the order patrol the empire searching for breaches to put an end to.

Religions

The Agrestal Spirit

The Untamed Ways of the nature spirits still loom large in the world of the Touched. The ancient whispers of the forests speak to the hearts of those who will take the time to listen and understand them. Cities, towns, and villages are buzzing with the constant noise of people who have forgotten the sound of peace, but those who seek it among the spirits of the forests can feel its natural rhythm.

The Agrestal Spirit has been the primary way of worship in Evaiara for generations, and it is much rarer in the Northlands, but it has never truly been forgotten. Those loyal to the cycle of the spirit hold the changing of the seasons in high regard, with great festivals on the changing of the season of growth to the season of decay and vice versa. These festivals usually include food and stories of the spirits.

Worship of the agrestal spirit is highly personal and seldom done with other people, though there are shepherds of the Agrestal Spirit who can help guide people to finding the spirit in nature. Shepherds usually pick a season that speaks to them and bind themselves to that season. Few of the Touched, even shepherds, find themselves in the presence of the courts of the spirit, and many believe them to be myths and stories. However, even those who believe them to be little more than stories heed well the lessons they learn about the spirits to protect themselves should they be wrong.

The Green Man

The months of growth, Laneren and Elared, are said to be the times the Green Man's court takes control. The Green Man and his court are responsible for bringing about the change of spring and growing the plants and animals all through the warm months. Those who walk the forest ways speak of the warm nights of the season of growth where the sound of flute music can be heard echoing through the

forest. They say the Green Man plays his music to draw people to him in the forest. Those that follow the song, like sailors dashed against the siren rocks, are never seen alive again.

Those who dedicate themselves as Shepherds of the Green Man rejoice in the warm months and seek to foster growth in those around them. They tend to be good natured and very charitable. They typically ornament themselves with leaves, the symbol of the Green Man.

Clerics who are Shepherds of the Green Man may take the Life, Nature, or Tempest domains.

Winterbone

During the months of Fóm and Celian the court of Winterbone takes control. Winterbone and his court cull the land of its resources, cutting back the old to make way for the new and to test the resolve of those that would stubbornly choose survival. Winterbone and his court are known to be mercurial, sometimes calling raging blowing storms of snow and ice, and other times giving warm thaws in the middle of the coldest months. Stories say that the court of Winterbone is more likely to make deals and give trials to mortals who seek favor, but both can be brutal and unforgiving. There is danger in any deal made with the court, but especially deals that are made in exchange for food, which always comes with hidden costs.

Shepherds of Winterbone see life as a test of survival. Every day is a challenge to overcome. They tend to be vigilant and untrusting, but highly skilled. They accept death as an inevitability, and honor the dead, often performing funeral rites across the regions when requested. They wear grey and wear a bangle with bones hanging off it.

Clerics who are Shepherds of Winterbone may take the Trickery, Grave, or Twilight domains.

The Heart of Creation

There is one legend of the Heart of Creation. For a vast majority of the year, the Heart of Creation slumbers. Only twice a year, once as the winter gives way to spring, and once as the summer transitions to fall, does the Heart of Creation awaken. The Heart gathers together both courts of the Agrestal Spirit. The Heart asks the court preparing for slumber how their season went and they tell of all that happened. The Heart listens, and when they are finished, composes a song that rings out among the court. The song memorializes the season that has passed and sets the direction for the season that is to come. The Heart of Creation is said to be

a guide for the Agrestal Spirit and both courts are bound to what the Heart commands.

Shepherds of the Heart of Creation are rare. Many are artists seeing inspiration, but some politicians and soldiers are drawn to the Heart of Creation as well. They wear a golden cord tied in a loop that rests on their shoulders.

Clerics who are Shepherds of the Heart of Creation may take the Light, Order, or Peace domains.

The Ancient Path

The myths that talk about the creation of the orcs speak of them being touched by the fae with the power of legacy. For the orcs this manifested as the greatest of their champions, upon their death, ascending to a state of godhood among their people. Common objects, infused with the spirits of these beings, would allow users to speak directly with their ancestors and draw power from them if granted by the ancient spirits. To walk the path is to speak with these ancestors and to heed their words, beseech their wisdom or power, and to take up quests in their name.

For many generations, only orcs could speak with the orc gods. As human culture and orc culture mixed, half-orcs, and eventually humans could speak with the spirits of the ancient path. Over time, the path has become more open to all beings who seek to walk it, though it presents itself more easily to those of like kin or those who are strong in spirit.

Ancient Guides

Many of the ancient guides are held openly at the Grand Temple of the Ancient Path in Grey Woods. Followers of the Path make their way to the grand temple to commune with the ancient spirits. The prominent gods available for all to speak to are Bone Breaker, Spirit Walker, and Truth Teller. When consulted, the spirits are like a snapshot of what they were when they died. They do not remember interactions or the state of the world outside the moment they were killed. Still, they have great, insightful wisdom to pass down to those who would seek and prove themselves worthy.

There are a great number of the stones still hidden about the world and many of the Followers of the Ancient Path seek them out. When they find them, they keep the object on their person that they may consult the creature stored away whenever they desire.

Clerics who are followers of the Ancient Path may take the Knowledge, Trickery, or War domains.

The Celestial Host

The Celestial Host is the largest religion in the New Merittan Empire and the primary religion in nearly every region. The adherents of the Celestial Host setup several temples in each region, typically one in each barony. The high temple in a region can employ as many as one hundred adherents, but regular temples usually have between a dozen and twenty five. Within the baronies, many shrines are built across the villages, usually one or two adherents will work the shrine, but sometimes villages simply take care of the shrine as part of their life. The High Basilica has thousands of adherents of varying levels studying theology and delivering sermons. Most who follow the celestial host do not ever lay eyes upon the High Basilica, but legends of its splendor can be heard in every corner of the empire.

Many of the followers of the Celestial Host do not choose a single member of the host to worship, but instead worship them together. As people rise in prestige in the church they become adherents, dedicating themselves to one of the gods. This does not mean they forsake the others, as they are still followers of the Host and worship all the gods, but they have dedicated their focus and study to one of the gods in particular. Not all adherents dedicate their full attention to the church. Many villages have a few adherents who are also farmers or craftsmen. Technically there is no hierarchy beyond adherent in the structure of the church but in practice there are very flexible power dynamics at play and a pecking order, while unspoken, most certainly exists.

Colliesto

Colliesto is known as the All-Seer, World Binder, and Fate Weaver. It is said that she views all of reality, including the planes of magic and beyond. She is said to have her hand at the loom of fate, weaving the tapestry of reality that all mortals are a part of. The planes are described as an ever-churning tempest of realities and Colliesto is seen as the guiding hand that calms the storm. Depictions of Colliesto vary, but all show her immense size compared to the depiction of the multiverse she holds in her hands. She is often blue in color with great glowing eyes, purple at their center. Her angels are depicted as beautiful purple skinned beings with butterfly-like wings that seem to be made of a glowing dust. Collietsto is frequently worshipped by those looking to improve their fate, asking the all-seer to scout their path and guide them on the correct one. Those who learned to travel between, or call to other planes, will frequently have shrines to Colliesto asking for protection as they meddle in the dangerous art.

Adherents of Colliesto usually wear purple emblazoned with a great eye on it to denote their devotion. Her adherents tend to be good natured about salutations

that they find themselves in, accepting whatever path Colliesto has chosen for them to follow. Their chief duty is to protect their plane from incursion by other extra-planar beings. Additionally, adherents of Colliesto frown upon manipulations of fate, and seek to bring justice to those who would cheat others by way of manipulation of fate.

Clerics who are adherents of Colliesto may take the Knowledge, War, or Tempest domains.

Hairix

Hairix is known as the Guardian, the True Magi, and the Great Draconic. Hairix represents the compassion of the Touched, their ability to make selfless choices for others. He is the god of magic, with more mage adherents than any of the other deities. Stories say Hairix watches over the material plane as a protector, driving away the darkness that seeks to consume it. Hairix is depicted as a great gold wyvern and is said to speak all languages. His angels are the wyvern of all colors that populate New Meritta. He is also frequently described as the father of the dragonborn in stories. Hairix is often tied to the cycle of life, death, and rebirth. He represents the eternal struggle faced by all of the Touched. Followers of Hairix tend to be adventurous, reveling in the idea that they are special and different. They tend to take fate head on.

Adherents of Hairix wear gold and carry with them a maumet of themselves. This represents the body, mind, and soul of the Touched. Each person is made up of all three aspects, but each person also resonates most strongly with one of the three aspects of the Touched. As such, adherents of Hairix seek to understand their aspect and guide others who share an aspect with them. In many ways, the adherents of Hairix are the most divided because of this. In some ways there are three churches of Hairix that all operate differently. And yet there is common ground amongst the sects; a stalwart commitment to the defense of the Touched and the traits that make them special. They are protectors of not only compassion, but they protect the aspects also connected with the Touched; such as free will. Adherents revere the wyvern, and to see one is said to be good luck.

Clerics who are adherents of Hairix may take the Light, Peace, or Twilight domains.

Iora

Iora is known as the Twins of Existence, The Font of Vitality, and the Crimson Light. Iora has two facets. One is the shining light, often representing the soul. It is the glimmer of personality that all of the Touched have. It is often said that the conscience is the light of Iora guiding all of the Touched. The other is the blood that courses through the creatures of New Meritta, representing the body. It is the

vitality and vigor of the Touched. Together, Iora's aspects form the life of the Touched. Iora represents the curiosity of the Touched, learning and exploring what it means to be Touched and chasing new and exciting experiences. Iora is often depicted as a human with two faces opposite one another; rich robes of red and white. Typically depictions show Iora with arms wide, but sometimes they show one arm raised and another pointing to the ground. Their angels come in two varieties, either they will appear as shimmering golden creatures with wings of pure light, or a burnished gold with long streaks of dark blood and wings of crimson light. Followers of Iora celebrate life and the aspects of the Touched that make them special. They try to uphold morality and act as a voice for the weak and underrepresented while trying to step themselves in the emotions they are naturally inclined to feel. Those who practice the healing arts look to Iora whose power has innate healing properties.

Adherents of Iora wear white and red, usually one of the colors is an accent for the other. They carry a vial of blood, blessed by an adherent at the temple of Iora once each year. Adherents seek to experience all that life has to offer, seeing the feelings and aspects of the Touched as true gifts from the faces of Iora. Their tenets push them to live a moral life, but to also accept the opportunity to engage in new experiences and many adherents struggle with the dichotomy often presented with those rules.

Clerics who are adherents of Iora may take the Life, Light, or Tempest domains.

Murkas

Murkas is known as the Lord of War, the Justicar, and the Balance of Judgement. Murkas represents the will of the Touched, both their ability to be stubborn and steadfast, and their ability to make choices and accept the consequences of those choices. He is the god of justice and many seek his guidance when dealing with matters of fairness. He is also the god of war, supporting the armies of the empire as they seek to defend their home from the Triton invaders. Murkas is depicted as a stout, proud dwarf in long scarlet robes with a long braided beard and filed ram horns on his head. He wears a single steel pauldron with a rams head on it. He is also depicted wielding a warhammer of interlocking twisted bars. It is both seen as a symbol of justice and a symbol of destruction for both of Murkas' aspects. His angels are depicted as large, strong beings with flaming swords and wings of metal and fire. Every few years the emperor will declare a day of games and activities in the name of Murkas to engender clean competition and fair play among the regions. The Murkians are declared by the emperor and each region gets a chance to host them.

Adherents of Murkas wear red and have the symbol of Murkas' hammer depicted on their clothing. Adherents are often sought to settle disputes or act as dealers of

imperial justice. The Scarlet Guard are a sect of adherents of Murkas largely created to handle injustice amongst the adherents, but their reach has expanded to all forms of heresy. Additionally, each battalion in the front lines of the war with the Tritons has an adherent of Murkas to help with strategy and act as chaplain. Adherents of Murkas tend to be stubborn but fair, and many engage in combat arts to feel closer to their deity.

Clerics who are adherents of Murkas may take the Order, War, or Forge domains.

Oliander

Oliander is known as the Winter Queen, the Raging Storm, and the Mother of Undead. She represents the natural end of all living things to die and decay, and then they become hers to rule over. For most followers of the Celestial Host, Oliander is largely feared. She is attributed to the dangerous storms and harsh conditions of nature, so many worship her in hopes it will abate her rage with the living. She is often depicted as a halfling draped in long grey robes; white hair and a harsh face are in most depictions. Her angels are grey-skinned creatures with wings of dead leaves or ice. The harvest festival each year is thrown in Oliander's name across the empire. It is a celebration of gathering food before it dies on the vine. Many dress as corpses, or other undead and those who are corpses find the harvest festival a great time to go and be among the living.

Adherents of Oliander wear grey with the symbol of Oliander, a snowflake, embroidered on it. They perform funeral rites for followers of the Celestial Host and help families deal with the grief associated with that. Many also research weather patterns and try to understand Oliander's whims when it comes to the weather, offering valuable services to nobles and farmers alike. They tend to be severe people, but they can be quite personable, especially those who help people through difficult times in their lives.

Clerics who are adherents of Oliander may take the Nature, Grave, or Twilight domains.

Sallius

Sallius is known as the Law Keeper, the Prime Muse, and the First Deception. She represents the creativity of the Touched; embodying structure from nothing, a trait that is unique to the societies of the Touched. She is the god of laws and knowledge, and she is called on to grant inspiration for great works of art or culture. Of the gods, she is the one most affiliated with cities and politics, especially for those who look for creative solutions to problems and loopholes in frameworks not well constructed. She is often depicted as a stiff-back elf with spectacles, hands behind her back and looking down on the world. Her angels are slender, shadowy

creatures with wings that appear to be made of scrolls flowing from their backs. There are rumors of secret societies within the highest tiers of government devoted to Sallius, but none have ever been officially confirmed.

Adherents of Sallius come from many walks of life. Many politicians follow Sallius in hopes to understand and work around and within the political structures they are a part of. Her adherents frequently believe that there is no amorality in exploiting a system as long as the rules of that system are clearly defined. Breaking the rules is not appropriate, but using the rules to your advantage is encouraged. Artists and scholars also tend to follow Sallius hoping to gain some new understanding or inspiration. Some of the greatest libraries in New Meritta are the temples to Sallius with tome after tome of history and lore. All adherents keep with them a journal or diary with a lock that they keep secure and record their story in.

Clerics who are adherents of Sallius may take the Knowledge, Trickery, or Order domains.

Vorillian

Vorillian is known as Old Wild Eye, Joy Maker, and the Chronicler. He represents one of the most important aspects of the Touched, that of legacy. Vorillian is the god of stories, and is the only god said to walk the material plane searching for stories to carry on. He is depicted as an elderly gnome in brown rags with a large patchwork sack on his back, twice the size of himself. Sometimes he is wearing a mask similar to the mendicant masks. His angels appear to be clockwork creatures with wings of brass. In stories about Vorillian, he is always good natured and quick with a joke or a trick. Many of the stories are about how he has escaped danger or duty by tricking the other gods. He is also said to be an incredible artificer, and some of the most amazing relics in the world are said to have come from his workshop.

Adherents of Vorillian tend to be good natured and joyful. Many bards and merchants become adherents, especially those who travel frequently. Many artificers also become adherents and some accounts of the dark days speak of the artifacts made from older artifacts being a technique passed down from Vorillian himself. Adherents tend to wear brown and carry a featureless white mask, like the mendicant masks, but expressionless.

Clerics who are adherents of Vorillian may take the Life, Trickery, or Forge domains.

The Enlightening

The Enlightening has slowly been gathering interest and attention since the return of magic to the world. Fundamentally, it is built on the question of power granted

by deities and how it truly works. Many who follow the path of the cleric can do magic gifted by their gods, but those gods are not always the same, and during the dark times, there was no power for them. Why did all their gods abandon them? A group of scholars began researching this and came to the conclusion that the power that those of the faithful wield was not from the gods themselves but accessed through them. Indeed they started to see a larger picture of magic connected to planes beyond and openly denounced the other religions. Soon members of the Enlightening emerged who claimed they could access the same divine powers the gods conferred without ever worshipping anything, simply by truly understanding the underpinnings of reality. They were labelled as heretics and the Scarlet Guard have called a crusade against them.

Many saw the members of the Enlightening as charlatans, using other forms of magic to pretend to have proof that denied the divine attributes conferred by the gods. But the Enlightening maintain that they have accessed the powers conferred by the gods without a deity, and that anyone that devotes themselves to the understanding of these secrets could do the same. Over time numbers have grown as more and more have come around to the thinking of the group. Still the smallest religion across the regions, The Enlightening is always seeking to better understand the magic of the divine and its true source. The Seekers of Discovery are those members who have dedicated their lives to the organization and fight to free the minds of others who do not see past the lies of the churches.

Clerics who are Seekers of Discovery may take the Knowledge, Light, or Order domains.

The Eternal Flame

Born out of the ancient kingdoms of the desert before the crystal eruption, The Eternal Flame seeks to understand the fire of the Touched that burns amongst all. The Eternal Flame speaks of the soul of the individual, burning brightly and providing the power of life and personality, and how that flame can be fed and nurtured through connection to the world around us. To feed one's spirit through meditation and connection to Onmeneth allows them to stoke the soul into a tempest when they must call upon its powers. It also seeks to strengthen the spirit to handle the harsh realities of life, that one might bend before a deluge of misery, but not be broken by it. The eternal flame has slowly spread across the regions but is most heavily followed in Mughamar.

Those who seek the Eternal Flame and try to understand it become known as the flameborn. Flameborn focus on the self, trying to understand what personal trials they must face to feed the flame that lies inside them. Eternal Flame monasteries provide places for those that seek the flame, but are also open to any who wish to

train or simply need a place to stay. They are fairly ascetic, but they provide the necessities to any who ask. Many artificers have found their way to becoming flameborn, claiming the Eternal Flame provides the exact kind of discipline best applied to the crafting of magic items. Flameborn almost always wear or carry a banner or a sash of red and yellow. Many choose to wear full robes of the colors.

Clerics who are flameborn may take the Nature, Tempest, or Forge domain.

The Teachings of Diam

Mastery over one's self begins with mastery over pain. So say the teachings of Diam, a set of rules passed down for hundreds of years created to allow the Touched to bring forth their best selves. Rituals of the Teachings are physically brutal and harsh. Great strain is put on disciples, always willingly, that they might come out stronger having survived, hopefully to one day obtain true peace of mind, uncaring of the dangers of the world. While some from the outside would call the actions taken barbaric, the teachings are very clear about what is and is not permissible. The techniques one endures to bring the wounding of the body cannot be intended to maim or incapacitate; nor can they be intended to take life. The recovery from the wounds one takes is the important aspect of the teachings, that through all of the hardships, the Touched are miraculous creatures of strength and recovery. Indeed mastery over the body allows many to be able to apply the same mastery to the expired bodies of others, pushing will and control into the corpses they come across. Deeply ingrained in the teachings of Diam is the need to use these tools to stand against darkness in all forms. They endure terrible agony to better themselves should they be needed to defend the tranquility of the world from the shadows descent.

The followers of the Teachings of Diam are known as the disciples of Diam and are typically not open about their membership in the religion. The teachings of Diam are deeply personal, and many who follow the rules do so anonymously, wearing masks and costumes to obfuscate their identity. While the teachings are not illegal in the empire, they are highly frowned upon and often violent crime and death is attributed to the Teachings of Diam whether that connection is justified or not. As such, the disciples of Diam do not have a lot to visibly mark who they are except for a tattoo that they can get somewhere on their body denoting their membership. It does not have to be, and frequently is not, openly visible.

Clerics who are disciples of Diam may take the Grave, Peace, or Twilight Domain.