



# INSURRECTION

## LRP

## **SETTING INFORMATION**

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### **Introduction**

Insurrection LRP is a live-action roleplaying game in a dystopian high-fantasy setting. The world itself is one of magic, with orcs, elves and dwarves ruling the roost, and humans crushed underfoot as slaves. On the surface, life is very good for most people; they abide by the laws and attract no trouble.

However, the political situation is dire indeed; since an attack by human-rights extremists on the orcs' most holy site seven years ago, a new government has formed – the Commonwealth of Elder Races. Ruled by a Supreme Council, the Commonwealth has instituted many "reforms," centralised authority, required people to carry passports, and generally taken over.

There are many who are not happy with this state of affairs; whether they want to go back to the old ways, oppose the reforms for intellectual or selfish reasons, or are driven by faith to stand up and be counted, there are rebels in the world. Insurrection LRP is their story.

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## **The Way Things Were**

Before the Crimson Canyon Massacre, things were very different. While there was certainly commerce between settlements (expedited via the Wayfarers' Guild), there was no real Government or central power. People generally lived in small single-race communities, following their own paths through life.

### **Dwarves**

Mainly concentrated in the western mountains, dwarves largely divided their time between building things, inventing things, and fighting Beastmen. Their concerns, aside from the Beastmen, were largely intellectual; all of the largest dwarfish settlements are focused around a University campus. It was in these hallowed halls that such inventions as the firearm were made using the dwarves' magical powers of Artifice. Their focus on academic achievement should in no way be taken to mean that dwarves have their heads in the clouds; as a race, they are hugely practical, and particularly talented in dealing with animals.

Dwarves do not exclusively, or even usually, live underground, but those who do are usually particularly talented at Artifice. These "mountain dwarves" spend their time locked in the deepest laboratories of the Universities, developing ever more complex and powerful creations. When they venture out, their pale grey (even white) hair is usually the only way to distinguish them from other dwarves.

Another group of dwarves of particular note are the rugged, flame-haired "timber dwarves." Originally sent north by the mountain dwarves to bring back the enchanted wood of the trees of the Great Weald, the timber dwarves have been locked in a bloody conflict with the elves of the Weald for the last two centuries. This war of attrition has left its mark on both races, changing both their priorities and their talents over time.

Beastmen are a huge problem for the dwarves, as they often infest the tunnels under the mountains; the Ratbreed are particularly notorious for this. Between their vast numbers and occasional magically-gifted animists, Beastmen pose a real threat to dwarven society, meaning that dwarves are inclined to kill Beastmen on sight.

The only thing dwarves hate more than Beastmen is their own bastard cousins, the gully dwarves. These spiteful villains have allied themselves with the Beastmen for their own nefarious aims. Occupying the hinterland between the mountains and orc territory, the gully dwarves live as bandits and highwaymen, profiting off the misery of others.

Artifice is the dwarves' High Magic; it is the long, slow sorcery of enchantment. Combined with their talent for invention, it is a tool which allows the creation of extremely powerful items. Firearms and teleportation gates are just two of the many products of dwarven experimentation and Artifice.

## Elves

Concentrated in the fertile and coastal lands of the south, elves' lives were filled with courtly intrigue and noble pursuits. Never especially numerous, elves are routinely schooled in their signature magic, Majesty, thus ensuring their position at the top of the pile in society.

While many elves have rural estates, there are also several cities in the south. These are especially busy in the spring, when each year's new crop of debutantes is released into the world at the height of the social season. Toward the end of the year, elves traditionally engage in less flamboyant and more political pursuits, each seeking a place at the High Table for the year ahead. At the end of each year, the Grand Ball takes place; the new High Table take power, and the social season is officially opened.

The very cream of elvish society is epitomised by the high elves; supremely skilled in Majesty, and too refined for martial activities, the high elves are distinguished by the blue stripe across their eyes and by their increased responsibilities; it is the high elves who must select candidates for the High Table (the most important political body among the elves), and who have the power to send worthy aspirants to the Undying Lands, across the southern ocean.

At the other end of the spectrum are the outcast dark elves. Easily identified by the curse which put a black stripe across their eyes, the dark elves are the lowest of the low among elvish society, because of their lack of ability with Majesty. The bulk of them live in exile in the north-eastern mountains, alongside an outpost of mountain dwarf researchers who rely heavily on the assistance of the dark elves, in a colony called Stonehaven.

As mentioned above, there is also a community of elves living in the far northwest, in the trees of the Great Weald. These wood elves have given up their chances of leaving for the Undying Lands in favour of protecting the magical forests of the north from the depredations of the timber dwarves. They wear a green stripe across their eyes to signify their devotion to the forest and their enmity for the loggers.

Aside from the dark elves, most elves make use of Majesty at some point. Their High Magic is based on the elves' natural sovereignty – some nobles even refer to it as the Birthright. It allows influence and control over the minds of others, and even, it is rumoured, over the elements themselves.

## Orcs

The orcs are a rowdy race of green- and brown-skinned warriors and hunters. Traditionally organised by blood, the word orcs use to refer to their "nation" is Horde. Within the horde, orcs are organised into different Tribes, of which there are currently twenty major examples. Each Tribe is further divided into Clans and Families, with the family being the basic unit of orcish culture.

Orc Tribes are largely nomadic, with an area across which they roam. The tribes occupy a sprawling mass of land in the centre of the country, south of the Inland Seas, and are frequently at war with one another, when they are not beset by natural disasters, which are common.

There are a few permanent settlements in tribal lands; these are "safe areas," where tribes meet to discuss marriage, trade and other such matters. They are also usually near sites holy to the Lupine Lord, the spiritual father of all orcs, meaning that orcs can come together to give thanks and ask for blessings from the Lupine Lord, regardless of their tribe.

Because the average orcish lifespan is shorter even than a human's, they tend to have a very collective approach to life – the family, clan, tribe and horde are always first in any given orc's mind. Almost every orc's goal, and the entire basis of Shamanism, is to do something so great that their name is remembered forever.

For example, the founder of the Weaselclaw Tribe was the most powerful shaman there has ever been, or ever will be. It was he who first called the Lupine Lord forth, and he who brought the law to the Horde – that once every ten years, on the full moon, the Lupine Lord must be called forth at the holiest site known to orcs (Crimson Canyon) so that he may select his heavenly vanguard – the Agaku.

Similarly, the founder of the Karg Tribe was the most cunning orc that ever lived. He managed to trick an entire city of elves into giving him their most powerful magical artefact, before leading his army to conquer almost the whole continent. He was only stopped at the last minute by elvish treachery. This was the last time anything resembling a Government has existed anywhere on the entire continent.

The orcish tendency toward collective thought is also their greatest weakness; although they are powerful warriors individually, and even more effective *en masse*, when they are deprived of leadership orcs have an unfortunate tendency to rout. Thus, orcish military tactics tend to demonstrate the tension between a general desperately wanting to lead from the front, and her troops' steely determination to keep her safe.

The orcs' greatest strength is their rich heritage; their shamans can call forth the spirits of their ancestors and even the animal totems to bless or possess orcs, and occasionally even manifest directly. This is a powerful tool, both in war and peace, for the Horde.

## Humans

Humanity are regarded simply as a resource by most of the High Races. Used across the continent as agricultural serfs, naval crews and conscript troops, humans in these roles are often worked very hard. Luckier humans find themselves as concubines or nannies for Elvish nobility, tradesmen or employees of the Wayfarers' Guild, or librarians and clerks in Dwarvish Universities. The most unfortunate of all are those enslaved by orcs, who use them as battle practice for their children and general beasts of burden in their nomadic culture.

This servitude is justified by two things. First, humans lack a certain organ, called the glans ocularis, which sits behind the sternum, just above the diaphragm. It is this gland, common to all the High Races, and present in a vestigial form in the Middle Races, which serves as the seat of the soul. Thanks to its absence, humans are considered much like other animals.

Secondly, humans are outsiders. They have long whispered tales that they were not from this land; they travelled across the sea, and they come from four great and powerful tribes, laid low by the schemes of the high races. Many dwarvish scholars research the history of the Incursion, during which time humans sought to usurp the place of the High Races and slew many of their betters before the newcomers could be put in their place.

Humans have spread across the whole continent, put to work by all of the high races, traded like cattle, used as cannon fodder against Beastmen, and generally misused. A very few have achieved a reasonable standard of living through working for the Wayfarers' Guild, and even fewer have managed to escape slavery and live free in the wild lands of the north, but the majority are kept as slaves. Some tell tales of a promised land over the sea, others of a beneficent supernatural being who watches over them, but this all comes to naught.

In the main, humans thought that life couldn't get much worse – until the Crimson Canyon Massacre. A group of human slaves escaped from the Ghed Tribe of orcs, and used a magical device given to them by the dark elves of Stonehaven to cause a huge explosion at the height of the orcs' most holy ceremony. They killed most of the most powerful shamans and generals of the Horde, sending the rest into disarray, rout, and a bloody fight to escape. All of the humans, who called themselves the Crimson Blades, were killed by berserk Agaku, but the damage was done.

However, in recent years some humans have claimed to have developed their own kind of magic, entirely distinct from the High Races' sorcery and thaumaturgy. This power, which they call Faith, is based around (some say drawn from or granted by) a collection of deities, called icons, and allows the human to throw off the High Races' chains and even turn the tables. Whether this is true or is just a fabrication to help them stay sane matters little.

## **Half-Breeds**

The majority of hybrids between a member of a high race and a human are killed at birth, as they bring great shame on their high-race parent – it is perfectly acceptable to use a human as a concubine or even to have an entire harem of the Lowest Race, but to spawn a half-human child is an abomination. The only ones spared are those with a talent for magic; they are capable of becoming more-than-competent thaumaturges, and thus serve a purpose beyond manual labour. They are expected to hone their talent, and thus rarely do well at anything other than thaumaturgy; a fittingly dangerous role for such base creatures.

Half-breeds take on the physical aspect of their mother – they appear more human if their mother was human, and more like their High Race heritage if she was an orc, elf or dwarf. To avoid confusion, all half-breeds are branded with a very clear mark on their face as soon as they reach five years of age; if this starts to fade, it is repeated time and again.

It is not known whether half-breeds can conceive children, whether amongst themselves, with humans or with others of their High Race heritage, as most are sterilised when they reach puberty, to avoid distractions from Thaumaturgy. Please note that dwarves, elves and orcs are not inter-fertile.

Thaumaturgy is common to all the High Races, and their bastard half-human offspring. A thaumaturge is basically an empty vessel, waiting to be filled by a ritual. This ritual must be performed by someone using High Magic, ideally of the same race as the Thaumaturge; in the case of half-breeds, the same race as their heritage is good enough.

Using specific formulae, recorded in a spellbook, the Thaumaturge may then channel this power into various effects. However, the effects of one Thaumaturge targeting another with magic can be disastrous; their power “earths,” damaging both sorcerers and emptying them of mana. It is for this reason that hybrids are more commonly used as thaumaturges.

## **How Things Are Now**

### **The rise of the Commonwealth:**

In the wake of the Crimson Canyon Massacre, the entire Horde was in disarray. The elven High Table was convened and they decided on a bold course of action.

They called a meeting of the leaders of the high races; the most respected dwarven academics, the remaining orcish generals and shamans, and (of course) the High Table. At the end of this meeting, they reached the Accord of Formation, announcing the inception of a new phase of history.

Agreeing that their shared interests outweighed their unfortunate pasts, and that they had a common enemy in human-rights extremists, they agreed to the founding of a central Government, to be based in the fertile south, called the Commonwealth of Elder Races. Its stated purpose was the mutual defence and support of the rightful rulers of the land against those who would seek to overturn the natural order.

### **The Supreme Council:**

At the head of the Commonwealth is the Supreme Council, which has seven members: General Kadrian Stormweaver and Wolfblood Weaselclaw, a shaman; Chancellors Gerhardt Filweather and Eugenie Ingetot; and finally, Duke Ladrill Southarbour, Marquess Eltz'bet Mundus, and Prince Orion. They claim sovereignty, on behalf of all the elder races, over the whole continent.

General Kadrian Stormweaver is very much into military proliferation, and sees working for the Commonwealth as sitting easily alongside traditional orcish practices. He is keen to look to the future, and sees strength as security. Wolfblood Weaselclaw was, in his time, one of the mightiest shamens in the Horde. However, he retired some seventeen years ago, and only the fact that all shamens senior to him were killed in the Crimson Canyon Massacre drew him back into circulation.

Chancellor Filweather is a renowned Artificer and thaumaturge, and serves as a cool voice of reason on the Council. He sees humans as a useful resource, and does not believe most of them capable of the acts of the Crimson Blades. Chancellor Ingetot is a famous military scientist and mechanical engineer, and views the conquest of the Great Weald as a priority. She is disinterested in the "human question."

Duke Ladrill Southarbour is the Minister of Defence for the Council. He holds political responsibility for the deployment of the Army. He takes a keen interest in counter-espionage activity.

Marquess Eltz'bet Mundus is actually a placeholder for her husband, the Duke de Wavecrest, who is gravely ill. She is commonly thought of as a bit of a soft touch, due to her charitable works and her numerous half-human offspring.

Finally, Prince Orion serves as the Chair of the Supreme Council, a role which operates on a "first among equals basis." He is a High Elf, known for his calm demeanour and lateral thinking.

### **Enemies of the State:**

All inhabitants of Stonehaven, whether dark elf or mountain dwarf, formally and fervently deny any role in the Crimson Canyon Massacre. They have invited inspectors from the Commonwealth to visit their laboratories and workplaces, to no avail. This puts them squarely in the firing line for the Commonwealth's major offensive.

Second in line is the Great Weald, in the Woldscar Demesne. For the past two centuries, this has been the scene of long-running guerrilla conflict between timber dwarves and wood elves, but in recent times, they have formed an unprecedented alliance. Both sides have come to an accord, on the basis that while they may not agree amongst themselves who truly "owns" the Weald, they can certainly concur that the Commonwealth has no claim over land they have both shed so much blood for.

Over the past seven years, many laws have been enacted to ensure both that little information, aside from that distributed by the Commonwealth itself, reaches most settlements, and that anyone caught questioning the Commonwealth's edicts is silenced, quickly and permanently.

### **The Fist of the Commonwealth:**

Since the inception of the Commonwealth, the orcish Horde has been organised more formally into an army/police force, both to discover and destroy any further activities by human-rights extremists, and to conquer those parts of the continent who have refused to join the Commonwealth. They form the cream of the Commonwealth's armed forces, the bulk of the fighting being done by human slaves. Common orc troops wear black uniform tabards over their armour, often bearing the symbol of the General to whom they owe their loyalty. Dwarfish smiths have been feverishly crafting weapons to arm the Horde properly, while scribes work all the hours of the day to produce the passports that everyone now needs to travel anywhere. This has impacted the Wayfarers' Guild particularly badly, as they used to be the primary source for the provision of goods and services across the land.

### **The Cleansing of Pure Waters:**

Terrified of the implications of the escape from Green Hills (see below), more orcs were conscripted into the Army. Even tribes previously considered anathema were forced into service. One such tribe were the Angir, whose Ancestor is one of rage and carnage. When humans at the Twin Forks camp, which they were guarding, started to show signs of Faith, the Angir didn't hesitate; they slaughtered every single one of the 300 humans in the camp, and then "purged" every other living being within a five-mile radius. The deaths outside of the camp included three noble households, the other two orc warbands responsible for the camp, a local patrol, approximately another 150 human slaves and uncounted livestock.

Although several on the Council moved to have the Angir put to death, General Ladrill Southarbour saw a better way; he recruited the Angir as an elite strike force, to be used in situations where standard tactics would be of no use. As a result, the Angir now answer directly to the Supreme Council, and can only be deployed by Executive Order. In honour of their first victory, Green Hills has been renamed Pure Waters.

### **Groups of Renown:**

Many groups within the High Races have sought and received formal recognition from the Commonwealth.

#### Dwarfish groups:

*Most Revered & Esteemed College of Physicians and Chirurgeons:* composed entirely of practitioners of Medicine and Surgery, their primary objectives are the technical advancement of their own members, maintaining the respect and admiration due to people of such skill, and the protection of the secrets of their craft.

*The Respected & Cherished Guild of Apothecaries:* a sister organisation to the College, this Guild operates on much the same basis but for Pharmacists.

*The Wise and Learned Company of Heroic Discovery:* explorers, archaeologists and adventurers all find a home here, where they can swap skills and tall tales while preparing for their next expedition.

*August Chamber of Industrial Unions:* comprising of the Tanners', Carpenters', Tailors', Smiths', Masons', Loggers', Farmers' and Miners' Unions, the August Chamber seeks to ensure a fair day's pay for a fair day's work.

*The Harmonious Brotherhood of the Wilderness:* an active political group that espouses an existence more in tune with nature. They seek a simple life of harmony and balance with the world around them.

*The Most Enlightened Convocation of the Sacred Seats of Learning:* made up of the Chancellors of the most important Universities, and the Deans of their most successful faculties, the Convocation has the right to speak on behalf of the entire academic community.

#### Elvish groups:

*Amaranth Brokerage:* a financial powerhouse that is second only to the Wayfarers' Guild, the Brokerage is an association of elven merchants and traders.

*Beaufort Gentlemen's Club:* an exclusive club, only for members of the most pedigree bloodlines of elvenkind, they seek to promote elven causes above all others.

*Discrete House of Provision:* this institution of elvish society provides the well-to-do with highly-trained human household servants and the famous elven butlers, who care for their master's every need.

*Knights of the White Veil:* a noble order of valiant warrior-poets, who protect the down-trodden and dispossessed from the society that spurns them.

*Long Street Runners:* with branches in every elven city, the Long Street Runners are a vital part of daily life, as they provide communication and haulage to anyone who has an account with them.

*Order of Damocles:* these elves see the "Dance" of elven society as a distraction from their mandate by the Divine Will to rule justly and fairly, and so immerse themselves in toil to purify their souls.

*Order of Storm-Masters:* this Order is made up of elven ship-captains with a talent for daring escapes from stormy seas.

*The Wallflowers:* this group defines themselves by what they are not; they see the "Dance" as immature, puerile and petty, and would rather live a life judged only by themselves than subject themselves to society's whims.

#### Orc groups:

*Lodge of the Great Spirits:* this is where many shamen learn the tales they tell of the Ancestors. It ensures that all orcs have a shaman to guide them.

*Lodge of the Owl:* sometimes conflict between individuals of different tribes look set to escalate without resolution. This Lodge exists to provide binding arbitration for those tribes who do not want to fight one another.

*Lodge of the Whipped Cur:* in orcish society, there are crimes for which even death is not sufficient punishment. In these cases, the guilty party is stripped of their name, their glory and their place in the Horde, and forced to join the Lodge of the Whipped Cur. Their facial tattoo is known to all orcs as a sign to stay away, or else risk dishonour.

*Lodge of the Winter Wolf:* comprised entirely of living legends, the Lodge of the Winter Wolf includes the mightiest warriors, leaders and shamen alive. Membership of this Lodge is a fair indication that an orc may become an Ancestor upon their death.

*Lodge of the Wolf in Summer:* this Lodge is made up of young orcish warriors, keen to prove their worth to the spirits. They engage in prize-fighting, blood sports and gladiatorial combat to show their prowess to the whole world.

#### Other groups:

*The Free Companies:* created by the Wayfarers' Guild, and still possessing strong ties with them, the Free Companies are made up of any number of mercenary groups of varying size from across the Commonwealth.

*The Princes of The Art:* the twelve Princes of the Art are the premier thaumaturges in the Commonwealth. Each heads a House of thaumaturges, the most famous of which is House Orion. All of the Princes are members of one of the High Races, and most are High Elves, Mountain Dwarves or orcs from the Weaselclaw Tribe.

*The Wayfarers' Guild:* a confederation of merchant caravans that used to drive commerce between the High Races before the rise of the Commonwealth, the Wayfarers' Guild now occupy a coveted position in the Commonwealth's logistics.

## **The Shape Of Things To Come**

Out of the oppression of the Commonwealth, several groups have formed in opposition to the new state of affairs. To date, these five rogue organisations have had little interaction with one another, doing the best they can to stay incognito as far as possible.

## **The Dawning Light**

The other major change to occur since the Crimson Canyon Massacre is the emergence of Faith. The high races always justified their maltreatment of humans because humans lack a soul (in the form of the *glans ocularis*), which gives the high races their magical power. Humans have no magic and are thus demonstrably inferior, or so the thinking went.

All that changed when humans first started manifesting the power of Faith, about five years ago. Organising themselves into cults, each based around an icon or group of icons, the Chosen Ones (i.e. humans wielding Faith) gained an outer circle of other humans who supported them. The advantage of Faith allowed large numbers of humans to escape their imprisonment, for example at Green Hills, a normal internment camp for suspect humans. Thanks to Faith, the humans were able to overcome their captors and escape totally unharmed by blade or Majesty.

The Dawning Light is a kind of ecumenical council of the four biggest cults in existence. These cults are:

- The *Re*. Their icon is a nameless Creator, whom they believe to have made the world. Viewing the high races as flawed early attempts, the Re see their role as taking power for humankind.
- The *Eshu*. They serve two interlinked icons, whom they name Helios and Luna. Helios represents the sun, life, vitality, masculinity and other such concepts, whereas Luna represents the moon, death, secrecy, femininity and much else besides. The energy created by the tension within the cult between followers of Helios and of Luna is put toward freeing humans from their bondage.
- The *Oisin*. There is great debate among the Oisin as to whether they serve one icon or three; if there is just one, she has three very different aspects, and if there are three, then they share much common ground. The first aspect is Belisent, whose purview is birth and growth. The second aspect is Viviane, whose purview is love and war. The final aspect is Gwyar, whose purview is death and divination.
- The *Sigurd*. Probably the darkest of all the cults, the Sigurd make no apologies for the four icons they follow, explaining only that one must fight fire with fire. Sigurd icons include Morbis, Chiturka, Vrees, and Tyranus, representing the death, destruction, fear and slavery humans experience thanks to the High Races. They turn these powers against their former masters, allowing them to experience what humans have had to endure for centuries.

Their symbol is a human hand with an eye in the palm. The Dawning Light relies heavily on the Faith of its members, and only admits humans.

## **The Free Thought Radicals**

Composed largely of dwarfish academics and students, the Free Thought Radicals view themselves as both an intellectual vanguard and academic elite. Believing that the Commonwealth is preventing the majority of people from achieving their potential (by imposing hefty fees on attendance at University, where previously it was free), the Radicals are committed to building a mass movement against the Supreme Council.

Probably the most outward-looking of the factions (with the possible exception of the Wayfarers' Guild), the Free Thought Radicals believe that the only way to overthrow the Council is for the general population to rise up. Obviously, this isn't going to happen any time soon, because the populace do not generally appreciate that there is a problem, much less the extent of it. So the Radicals spend their time writing, publishing and distributing pamphlets to inform people of the situation, organising seminars to help educate people on the issues, and running free schools to "capture the minds of the children."

Although rife with infighting, the Radicals have a solid theoretical basis for their dissent, and tend to err against violence as a solution to the problems. As many people are deterred by the Radicals' intellectual rigour as are convinced by it, but each new convert is a new opportunity to start the revolution. Its members include all kinds of dwarf, and also some Dark Elves and half-dwarves.

## **The Velvet Glove**

A coterie of elves who have come to believe that the structures of the Commonwealth are stratified beyond salvage, the Velvet Glove has at its centre a mysterious benefactor providing both information and funds. Particularly concerned with the Commonwealth's agenda of conquering the dark elf homeland of Stonehaven, the Velvet Glove operates largely undercover, with its members occupying positions in society just like any other elf.

Their agenda is to overthrow the Commonwealth by any means necessary, as they believe the current system prevents young members of the high races from achieving their potential. Some are even rumoured to believe that the Undying Lands are simply a fiction, which is akin to blasphemy among elvish society.

Only elves (including High Elves, but not Dark Elves) and half-elves may join the Velvet Glove.

## **Duke Ladrill's Second Company**

The rebel group called Duke Ladrill's Second Company is led by one Colonel Ugluk Stormweaver. While not objecting to the idea of the Commonwealth as such, Ugluk objects to the way that orcish tribal boundaries have been ignored, instead creating an army (rather than a Horde!) consisting of units made up of orcs who aren't related to one another. This has led to a lot of friction within units, particularly when members of rival tribes are stationed together.

Many of the troops in the Company, especially the grunts, aren't interested in the politics and are just doing as they're told by the colonel. For most, however, the name was the final straw. The Company was named after its elvish sponsor, rather than a totem or Ancestor, as is traditional. While most members of this faction are orcs (of all types) and half-orcs, there are also elf officers (albeit neither High nor Dark Elves) and dwarven quartermasters and medics (but notably no Mountain Dwarves).

## **The Wayfarers' Guild**

The Insurrection equivalent of a cross between a mercenary company, a multinational corporation and an underground railroad, the Wayfarers have always been unusual. They operated a strict meritocracy, meaning that even some humans have made it into positions of importance within the Guild. Before the Commonwealth, no one batted an eyelid.

Nowadays, however, the Commonwealth extorts a tax on all of the Guild's transactions, massively cutting down their profits, and several of the Guild's operatives have been imprisoned or even killed simply for "trading while human," as cynical Wayfarers would have it.

The Guild has decided that enough is enough, and so they have turned their considerable pool of talent to political dissent, with a view to improving conditions in which to trade.

It is at the Guild's urging that all five of the rebel groups have agreed to meet in order to discuss a way forward, if one can be found. The only race not represented somewhere within the Guild is the High Elves, and any humans that develop Faith tend to leave shortly afterward to be with their own kind.

## **A Bestiary**

Of course, not every threat is political. Some are much more straightforward.

**Beastmen:** The fruit of unclean unions between humans and animals, these abominations plague the whole continent. In particular, the Ratbreed vie for control over the underworld with the dwarves. They look like humans with large, misshapen animal heads, and are rarely capable of using language. In large enough numbers, some are rumoured to be capable of magical powers. They are also frequently accompanied by the unkempt Gully Dwarves, who side with them against their own kin.

**Trolls:** A strange and inbred tribe of orcs, these bulky monstrosities are immune to almost any kind of damage thanks to their superior capacity to heal. Only poison and fire can cause them lasting harm.

**Ogres:** Another mutant breed of orc, ogres have a single horn in their forehead and are even stronger than the average orc. What they gain in physical prowess, however, they more than lose in intelligence. Their horn is said to be a powerful aphrodisiac, and thus sought after by the well-to-do.

**Goblins:** The mirror-image of ogres, goblins are the most cunning and malevolent of all the orc tribes. Often bullied and picked on by other orcs, the Goblin tribe compensate for their physical weakness by extensive use of traps, poisons and magic.

Rumours abound also of vampires, werewolves, demons, the undead and all manner of other creatures, but most right-thinking members of the high races dismiss these as mere folklore.

## **Better Living Through Chemistry**

One of the key commodities sold by the Wayfarers' Guild are potions. Most people are familiar with the effects of most potions:

Absorb Potion renders the drinker immune to magic. Antidote cancels the effects of weaker poisons, much as Sovereign Specific defeats all such toxins. Anti-Paralysation Lotion (APL) can be used to restore sensation to stunned areas. Calmative is used to treat heart attack victims and can save lives if applied in a timely fashion. Healing Lotion can be rubbed into wounds to promote healing, much as Healing Potion can be drunk for the same effect. Potions of Invisibility do much as their name suggests. Knit Bone Unguent is applied to broken bones along with a splint to ensure quick healing. Potions of Might enhance the drinker's strength. Poultice is a herbal compound applied to a wound on a bandage that promotes healing and the closing of wounds. Salve is used to clean infected wounds. A Stamina Potion helps restores fighting spirit – the Potion of Spirit Strength has an even stronger effect. Yggdrasil's Tears render the drinker immune to paralytic effects, as their heart is melted by memories of the potion's namesake's terrible plight.

## **Economics**

When the Wayfarers' Guild first started making their journeys across the continent about fifty years ago, they encountered the problem that there was often no currency, particularly in orc areas, and so they had to barter for goods and services. While this is, of course, their stock-in-trade, they decided that they needed a means of standardising the trade to make sure that individual Guild members were all at least breaking even. With that in mind, they devised the world's first money; a promissory note of agreed value, tradable between individuals. Over time, this idea took hold and the printed Florins (so named for the lily symbol of the Guild which appears on them) are now in widespread circulation for all manner of transactions, whether with the Guild or otherwise. The value of one Florin is fixed as one-tenth of the cost of an untrained human slave. This guarantee is what has given the currency its staying power to date.

The Guild also facilitates the movement of raw materials, as these things are too large to transport via the hub system; one simply delivers an appropriate measure of raw material to a Wayfarer trading post, and is issued with a receipt which can then be redeemed at any other trading post for the same quantity of product. This convenience is another reason for the Guild's ubiquity.

## **Bureaucracy and Travel in the Commonwealth**

A key feature of life under the Commonwealth is the all-pervasive presence of bureaucracy. The Commonwealth is organised into 35 administrative areas called Demesnes (10 dwarven, 15 elven and 20 orcish), each of which is ruled by a Demesne Commander holding the Rank of Chancellor, Duke or General and second only in authority to members of the Supreme Council. The capital of each Demesne contains a teleportation hub, an Artificed device that permits magical travel to other Demesne Hubs or to smaller client devices scattered throughout the Demesne served by the Hub. Below the Demesne level, the Commonwealth is split into equally-sized geographical units called CWEs, each of which is identified by a four-letter code and which is served by at least one client teleportation pad.

There are also two areas designated as Demesnes which refuse Commonwealth control – Stonehaven and Woldscar (the Great Weald). They heavily restrict teleportation into and out of their hubs. Although the teleportation system is no use for transporting large numbers of troops, they are wary of infiltration by spies.

Aside from Stonehaven and Woldscar, transportation via the hub system is relatively easy. All that is actually required is a power source, called a Teleportation Crystal, which is destroyed in the process. This is how transport from a client device to a hub works; to travel out from a hub generally requires suitable paperwork in the form of a Passport, and payment to an Artificer who can set the relevant co-ordinates for your destination.

Much is made in the Commonwealth of paperwork. Each citizen is expected to carry their Registration of Identity document, which gives their name, home Demesne, race, and Rank, although additional paperwork is required as proof of Rank. Each area of land to which a person holds title is recorded on a Title Deed jointly administered by the Wayfarers' Guild and the Commonwealth, giving the name of the owner, its CWE designation, and the Demesne in which it can be found.

Each unit of slaves owned by a particular member of the High Races also comes with appropriate documentation, recording the slave-brand found on each member of the unit. The bearer of Title Deeds and Certificates of Ownership is presumed to have a strong claim on the land/slaves described, unless the person named as the owner is of higher Rank than they are.

Certain slaves are lucky enough to be granted the privilege of a name, an act which is performed only in exceptional circumstances and which is reflected in their Article of Naming. This document is to be held by the owner in order that the guilty party may be identified if the slave is to commit some crime.

In certain cases, you may be granted an Exceptional Requisition and Permit for Transport and Use. Aside from being necessary for a slave to travel with their owner (assuming said owner has been issued a Passport), it also applies when an owner may wish their slave to go armed as a bodyguard, or when someone's superior has granted them the temporary dispensation to wear and use arms and/or armour greater than their Rank would ordinarily allow.

### **Written Communication**

Most people in the Commonwealth, with the exception of certain orcs, know how to read. Despite their disparate cultural backgrounds, all of the High Races (and the humans by osmosis) speak the same language and write in the same alphabet. However, each of the High Races also has their own ancestral alphabet to describe the same letters. Most members of the High Races have only a passing familiarity with this ancestral alphabet, preferring instead the shared alphabet used for the common tongue.