

Looking back one hundred and fifty cycles before the Age of Separation, a common system had been established. A system of rules and penalties decided upon by the Council had established an order to a life of chaos. There were duties to be done to contribute to the common good. We were given the duties of Builders because our short height was offset by our great strength.

Decades of hard labor taught us certain fundamentals about construction and metal working. After years of an oral tradition of training apprentices, a method of recording notes of techniques and even for marking accurate measurements was conceived. This method of writing became a jealously guarded secret because those of the other castes typically saw us as all brawn and no brains, but this writing was our private achievement that gave us something over the rest. Those not of the Builders caste thought the markings to be decorations because of the very regular square shapes to them, and the fact that they were sometimes written on top of each other into a design that would represent a short word.

The attacks of the Dragons did not lighten once we had shelters. In fact, in response to our ever-improving structures, the dragons became more aggressive. This led to uncountable repairs and sometimes complete rebuilding of some structures. The labor was hard and never ending, but we accepted our positions. This system went unchallenged for one hundred years.

The third generation – the ones who had not experienced the chaos of the dragons from the EARLY YEARS – were the first to question the status quo. They were the first to be born into the hard life of Builders, and the first to recognize the oppressive nature of the System.

It is always the young who initiate change.

The first grumblings came fifty cycles before the separation. The grievances and questions were brought before the elders of the Builder caste. They, in turn, brought THEM before the Council after some deliberation. The council rebuked the complaints on the basis of history: The system had worked for one hundred cycles, and therefore needed no revisions.

They could not see the unequal distribution of labor, they couldn't understand a Builder wanting to farm, they couldn't understand a Builder wanting to hunt, they couldn't conceive of the builders desire to have a choice in the matter. They believed that those born into the Builders caste should grow to learn the craft and become Builders, the same with the Farmers becoming Farmers, and the Council becoming council. It was just the natural order of things,

and had served all I VERY well I for A CENTURY. The El ders accomplished nothing in these meetings, and nothing changed, until t he Turnover.

Every fifty cycles, a new council of El ders is formed to oversee all construction projects and to serve as go-betweens with the council. Once this turnover happened, the Third el ders were formed from the same generation that had begun complaining during the time of the Second El ders. Upon inauguration, the thir d El ders again brought their complaints before the council, but this time with an ultimatum: Change, or separation.

The council was steadfast, and clung to the old rationale. They claimed that one hundred and fifty cycles was an even stronger argument for keeping things as they were than the one hundred cycle justification given to the second el ders. This argument held no wine for the thir d el ders, and they made good on their threat; virtual ly all members of the Buil ders caste left the fortifications we had buil t and headed north.

Heading north, our stout bodies served us well, providing some insulation against the col der climate and providing sufficient lung capacity to breathe at the higher elevations. As we travel ed, we would take refuge in caves and send out scouting parties to locate and mark safe and dangerous passages. The progress was slow, but rel atively safe. We had little contact with dragons, because they did not expect us to be venturing out as far as we were.

After travel ling this way for ten cycles, we reached a seemingly impassable mountain range. The el ders decided that this would be our new lands. We immediately set to the task of finding and securing sources of water, food and shel ter. The game was plentiful in this virgin landscape, and hunting was good and easier than what had been reported by the hunter caste of our previous community. It was later surmised that over-hunting in the central plains led to scarce and skit tish game.

By the time of the fourth El ders, the community had outgrown the natural ly occurring caves, so Methods of mining were explored and perfected. our prior architectural experience laid groundwork for an easy transition to mining. original ly, we reinforced our mines with wooden beams, but it was not long before the dangers of this were made known; Wood rots in the humid air of caves, and readily catches fire from the work torches, so another method of reinforcement was explored. Soon we were using the very rock we were carving to reinforce itself, eliminating the need for harvesting large trees for structure, and enabling us to

embellish the interiors of the caverns. We could maintain a strictly stone structure that would not rot; would not burn, Majestic structures that would stand the test of time.

—The sixth Elders were witness to a miracle. Our tunneling breached a dragons den. The dragon was old and dying and chose not to destroy us (as he very easily could have, even in his aged state). He instead wished for companionship. He had been **Kami Tatsu** –Top Dragon- of his clutch, but had grown ancient and weakened. Another, younger dragon, had challenged him and driven him from his clutch to die. The dragon had been in this cavern for one hundred cycles waiting for death, growing bored and lonely, when we stumbled upon him. When it was made clear that he desired company, we gladly joined this dragon and learned many wonders of **Magick**. He lent his flame to our forges, and our steel became harder. We fed the dragon all that it wanted, and to this day, it has not yet passed on. Its fires still run our forges, and its knowledge of **magick** and history continue to fascinate us all.

—In the time of the **Ninth Elders**, our eastern-most pass was breached by humans. It was only about 20 cycles until the sightings of humans by our far watchers became too frequent for our peace of mind. One of the human far watchers was captured and brought before the **Elders**. He was hesitant at first to offer any information. He would not talk about where he came from, or what the humans were doing in the northern mountain range.

—It was decided by the Elders that perhaps his tongue would loose if he were made to feel more at ease, so a banquet was planned, and game was hunted. He was given freedom to roam the halls and was given a place to rest. The only thing he was passively not allowed to do was leave. The banquet was grand, and the human ate appreciatively. The **Ale** was very much to his liking, and that was to be his undoing. The humans had some equivalent to our **Ale**, but it was apparently not as potent. Thus, it was only a few drinks before his tongue became loose beyond silencing.

—These were not the peaceful passive humans we had left with the **Elves**, these were people of conquest. The human far watchers were gathering intelligence to plan a conquest of our **Lands** in their drive for expansion. Two weeks after his capture, the human petitioned the Elders to join the **Dwarves**. His reason being his term of absence. If he were to return after this period of time, he would be executed upon recovery on grounds of possible treason. The elders deliberated for a brief period, and a decision was reached. the human was integrated. After 5 cycles living with us, he became military advisor to the elders, in order to prepare us for the

coming invasion. He had lived our life and desired to preserve its peace. A common turn of phrase from this incident became "Do not judge someone until you've lived a cycle in his halls".

When the attack came, we were very well prepared, and boasted superior armor and weapons, as well as an easily defendable position. There were only a few entrances, and these were protected by powerful Rune Magicks as well as by fierce Dwarvish warriors. The persistent humans waged this battle for ten cycles before they finally gave up. Their losses were great, and they had gained nothing.

We did not hear of the humans again for one hundred cycles, but in the time of the Ten and First Elders, the humans once again made their presence known. This time they kept their intentions clear, and their tongues civil. They wished to initiate a trade agreement with the Dwarves. The terms were worked out, and at the time of the Ten and second Elders, an agreement was signed. The humans of the north became our allies, and traded their crops for our weapons. They asked after our building techniques, but as always, we retained our skills for ourselves. This held true for construction of weapons and armor as well as architecture.

When next we met, in the time of the Ten and Fifth Elders, it was to debate a retaliation against the elves. Our old hatred of the elves had waned to merely a strong disliking coupled with dark memories, but some Dwarves still harbored darkness against the elves through their lineage. These Dwarves petitioned to be a part of the offensive while the majority of us were content to stay separate from the conflict. After 50 cycles of intelligence gathering, in the time of the ten and Eighth Elders, the war officially began.

As a society, we dwarves had turned a blind eye to the conflict in the south. For one hundred and fifty Cycles we went about our business of living, not knowing what had become of those who had gone with the humans, until their return. They came in a mob, clearly more than we had sent away -proving the tenacity of dwarves to thrive—these were the children of those who had gone to war. Born into an environment of war and humans, these dwarves lacked the social graces of those who had stayed behind, yet they were still welcomed back into the halls as brothers and sisters.

They told stories of their parentage, of the humans' bravery and of the treachery of the elves. They came to us with stories of a new breed of Hito, one of purest evil—stories to give the young ones nightmares. They told of creatures called Orcs, who looked somewhat related to elves, yet they were a gross parody of the elegant creatures. They knew no end to cruelty

and were ferocious in battle. They became involved in the conflict twenty-five cycles after its beginning, and seemed to be coming from the west. The war became bloody and fierce after their arrival, yet the humans continued waging war for another hundred cycles before the taste of war began to sour in their mouths, and the mothers grew tired of having children just to send them to war. The conflict was waged for one hundred and fifty cycles overall, and resulted in nothing but loss of life – The very reasons the Elders did not commit our whole numbers to the conflict: nothing was to be gained from it.

Now, after the war, we are back to our old way of life, mostly unaffected by the tragedies the humans and elves brought upon themselves. The old ways of the elves have not been forgotten, and the new atrocities are simply heaped upon the old ways. Though, as dwarves, it is our way to continue on in solitude, and remember the past so we do not fall prey to the mistakes made by others.