

Introduction to the Eberron Campaign Setting

The following information was compiled from various articles about Eberron on the Wizards of the Coast official Eberron Setting website.

Brief History of Khorvaire

In ages long past, the entirety of Khorvaire was ruled by goblinoids. Those goblinoid nations were already in ruin when humans first arrived, nearly 3,000 years ago. Humans quickly settled the area that became known as the Five Nations (Aundair, Breland, Cyre, Karrnath, and Thrane). As dragonmarks began to appear and the dragonmarked houses began to grow in power, humankind was also spreading out and interacting with the other races it encountered. Human beings traded and formed other partnerships with the dwarves, gnomes, and halflings they encountered. Humanity also came into conflict with and drove off goblinoids and other monster races. Elves migrated from Aerenal, seeking a new way of life on Khorvaire, and soon allied with the other humanoid races. As exploration continued and other portions of Khorvaire were settled, the Five Nations united to become the kingdom of Galifar.

During the nearly 900-year reign of the Galifar kings and queens, human-settled lands continued to expand and the powerful dragonmarked houses were set firmly in place. The wondrous Korranberg Library and Sharn, the City of Towers, were established and grew in reputation. The lands of the kingdom of Galifar stretched from the Barren Sea to the Lhazaar Sea, covering every mile of the continent, though the government was only able to maintain reliable control of the central region. The closer one traveled toward the outer edges of the continent, the more undeveloped and uncivilized the land, and its inhabitants, became. These frontiers gave rise to missionaries, settlers, profiteers, and other explorers.

In 894 YK, King Jarot, the last king of Galifar, died. With his death, the kingdom of Galifar collapsed as civil war erupted, sparked by the scions of Jarot as each battled for control of the eroding kingdom. This terrible conflict, which became known as the Last War, lasted just over a century and came to an end with the signing of the Thronehold Accords by the twelve standing nations: Aundair, Breland, Darguun, the Eldeen Reaches, Karrnath, the Lhazaar Principalities, the Mror Holds, Q'barra, the Talenta Plains, Thrane, Valenar, and Zilargo. Other regions formed during the war include Droaam, the Shadow Marches, the Demon Wastes, and the Mournland (which covers the land formerly occupied by the nation of Cyre.) These various nations and regions make up the current-day continent of Khorvaire.

Current Situation

As the campaign begins, Eberron emerges from a long and devastating war. The nations of the continent of Khorvaire were once part of a great kingdom of legend, the mighty kingdom of Galifar. When King Jarot died, his five heirs, each in command of one of the Five Nations that comprised the kingdom, refused to bow to tradition. Instead of allowing the eldest son to take the crown, the siblings rallied their vassals and each vied to take control of the kingdom. Over time, this decades-long conflict became known as the Last War, for everyone imagined that when it finally ended the taste for bloodshed and battle would be wiped from the face of Khorvaire.

The Last War continued for more than a century, with each of the Five Nations alternately fighting against or alongside one or more of the others as alliances and animosities shifted as fast as the wind in the Shargon Straits. In time, other nations formed as deals were made and opportunities presented themselves. After 102 years of fighting, the leaders of the recognized nations of Khorvaire (which now numbered twelve) met at the ancient capital of Galifar to draft a peace. With the signing of the Treaty of Thronehold, the Last War came to an end.

Today, the nations of Khorvaire seek to rebuild and prosper as the new peace spreads across the land. While technically at peace, the nations continue to vie for economic and political supremacy. Minor skirmishes break out every so often, especially in the more remote sections of the continent and on the most hotly contested borders. Espionage and sabotage are the preferred method of diplomacy, as the nations engage in trade and discussion in public while working intrigues and double-crosses in the shadows.

Religion in Eberron

Religion plays an important role in Eberron, and future Dragonshards will take a closer look at each of the major religions found in the world. First it is necessary to understand the role of religion and divine magic in the setting, and the ways that the churches and clerics of Eberron differ from their counterparts in other published worlds.

The Nature of the Gods

In many Dungeons & Dragons settings, deities are beings that player characters can interact with directly. There is no question whether the gods exist; if you're an experienced planar traveler, you can drop by Asgard and beat up Thor. Fundamentally, deities are just very powerful characters.

This is not the case in Eberron. While many of the deities are portrayed with anthropomorphic icons, they do not walk the mortal world or even the known planes. If they exist at all, deities inhabit a higher plane of existence -- a realm that cannot be reached with planar travel. Some believe that the souls of heroes travel to this realm after passing through the darkness of Dolurrh; while this is a comforting belief, it has never been proven.

If the gods may not even exist, who do you commune with? Why do planar allies answer your call? Divine magic exists, and most believe that it is a gift from the gods. Something provides answers to commune, and a priest believes it to be his deity. A skeptic may counter that it is the collective unconscious or merely a powerful outsider. As for planar allies, reverence for the gods is not limited to mortals. Celestials and fiends also worship deities. An archon dedicated to Dol Arrah may never have seen the face of the goddess but it believes in her implicitly, and it will aid those mortals who fight in her name.

Ultimately, belief in a deity is a matter of faith. Each deity represents an ideal and espouses a certain code and approach to life. When you embrace the path of a god, you become part of a community in the mortal world. Perhaps, if you are deeply spiritual, you will gain the power to perform miracles of divine magic. This is what people expect of the gods of Eberron: they affect the world by guiding and empowering their followers, not by manifesting and taking direct action.

Alignment versus Belief

One of the major changes in the Eberron Campaign Setting is that a cleric's alignment does not have to match that of his deity. A lawful evil cleric can worship a chaotic good god, and he will still receive spells and granted powers. The main question is what this divergent alignment means. It may be that the priest is betraying the ideals of his church. It is equally possible that the priest fervently believes in the principles of his religion but approaches them in an unusual manner. For example, an inquisitor of the Silver Flame may be lawful evil. He is willing to torture and kill in the interest of what he views as "the greater good," and he truly believes that he is carrying out the wishes of the Flame when he does so. Good-aligned members of the church may find his methods abhorrent, but the question is whether his results serve the goals of the church. In the minds of the people, questions of good and evil are far broader than "what can be detected by detect evil?" When the Silver Flame began its crusade against lycanthropy, the soldiers knew that there were individual lycanthropes that were not evil. But lycanthropy itself -- a curse that could corrupt the body and soul of anyone it touched -- was seen as evil, and the sacrifice of innocents was necessary to purge the greater darkness.

Pantheistic Clerics and the Cleric with No God

One of the predominant religions of Eberron is the worship of the Sovereign Host, along with its shadow, the Dark Six. Most people worship the entire host and address their prayers to whichever deity suits the needs of the moment. A traveler may offer a prayer to Kol Korran when boarding a ship, give thanks to Olladra after an excellent meal, and make a sacrifice to Dol Dorn when a pirate ship appears on the horizon. Priests typically serve a particular sovereign, but a cleric can choose to worship the pantheon as a whole.

As described on page 35 of the Eberron Campaign Setting, it is possible for a cleric to have no god and still perform divine magic. This is not, however, the same as having no beliefs; it still requires a strong commitment to an ideal or a philosophy. The cleric needs to devise his own system of belief and explain how it justifies the domains he has selected, and the DM always has the authority to disallow a combination of domains. The goal is to allow a broad range of personal faiths -- like the warforged developing their own religions -- not to encourage players to pick domains based solely on granted abilities.

Divine Magic in the World

Arcane magic is seen as a science. It is a force that can be controlled through formula and incantation. Divine magic is quite different: it is a miracle of faith. True clerics are rare. They are the crusaders of the church, skilled in battle and capable of channeling the power of their deity. The vast majority of priests are experts who possess no spellcasting ability whatsoever. An average religious expert might possess Knowledge (religion), Knowledge (History), Heal, Diplomacy, and Sense Motive, and use these skills to provide spiritual guidance to her community. Most divine spellcasters are adepts, just as most arcane spellcasters are magewrights. A cleric of any level is a remarkable figure.

A side effect of this is that most temples do not sell divine spells. To begin with, many temples don't have a divine spellcaster. Those that do will not sell the gifts of their god for mere gold. If the petitioner is a loyal member of the faith, an adept may aid him at no cost, or the adept may set a price based on the abilities of the adventurer, calling upon him to make a sacrifice to prove his faith or perform a service in the name of the church. The more powerful the spell, the more significant the sacrifice or service. If a nonbeliever serves the cause of the church, it's possible a priest will provide assistance, but a temple is not a marketplace. No one can demand a miracle as if purchasing a spell from a wizard's guild. Needless to say, this makes a character's choice of religion an important decision. A cleric of the Blood of Vol will never consider helping a follower of the Silver Flame, and you'd be soiling your faith even to ask.

There is a notable exception to this rule: corrupt clerics. Especially in Breland, there are priests who are more interested in lining their pockets than serving the faithful. If you can find such a cleric, you can purchase any spell he can cast, at standard prices.

Magic in Eberron

Magic is a part of life in Eberron. Arcane energy suffuses the world. Those with sufficient knowledge can channel and shape this power with word and gesture. Once this gift was rare and mysterious, and the greatest spells are still the stuff of legend. Over the course of centuries, however, the people of Khorvaire worked minor magics into everyday life, finding ways to use arcane power to improve communication, transportation, warfare, and general labor. The use of magic in Eberron is a broad topic that will be explored over the course of many future articles. This column focuses on the most common form of arcane spellcaster, the class whose existence transformed Khorvaire: the magewright.

The Meaning of "Magewright"

Arcane power is invisible and omnipresent. Ritual allows a magic user to draw on this energy and use it to reshape reality. The process of spellcasting is considerably more complicated than wiggling a finger and shouting a word. Mastering a spell requires intense mental discipline. In addition to complex gestures and incantations, a spellcaster uses thought and will to transform and shape mystical energy. A true wizard is a master of this art, able to grasp the principles behind any spell he can find or create. This level of talent is a rare gift. Still, most common folk can learn to cast one or two minor spells, if they work hard enough. While they lack the diversity or raw power of the wizard or sorcerer, these lesser spellcasters bring simple magic to the marketplace and into the world. These are the magewrights.

Just like the expert, "magewright" is a generic term encompassing dozens of professions. "Magewright" describes a character's magical skill but it tells you nothing about the actual trade she practices. A commoner seeking to learn magic wouldn't go to "magewright school." Instead, he would become an apprentice wordsmith or seek out a traveling tinker who might share the secrets of her trade.

Races in Eberron

In a standard campaign, racial interaction among the Player's Handbook races is pretty simple. Humans get along with everyone, dwarves think elves are flighty, nobody trusts half-orcs, and so on. Despite these feelings, the typical D&D campaign has a fairly cosmopolitan feel, with all races living in peace in larger cities with no serious racial conflicts. In the Eberron setting, things are much more complicated, mainly in that there are different groups of each race, and people may have bad feelings toward one and not the other; racism's roots in Eberron, as in the real world, tend to be based on culture rather than actual race. (As the Eberron Campaign Setting says on page 24, "A character from an Eberron campaign is never just a human or a dwarf: He is a human from Thrane or a dwarf from the Mror Holds.")

For example, the elves of House Phiarlan are an old dragonmarked house with a centuries-long history of entertainment and artistry; most common folk praise them and their work. In contrast to that house, the elves of the new nation of Valenar are seen as land thieves and a threat to the peace established by the Treaty of Thronehold. Will the acts of the Valenar elves paint those of House Phiarlan with the same stigma? Will the people of Khorvaire grow to dislike elves as a whole but tolerate House Phiarlan because "they're the good ones"?

Humans, as rulers of much of Khorvaire for nearly a thousand years, have a reputation for nation building. Sharn is arguably the greatest city on the continent, and its residents see themselves as the most civilized people on the continent. By contrast, the humans of the Shadow Marches are illiterate unwashed swamp-dwellers who consort with orcs. Even though a human from Sharn may look exactly like a human from the Shadow Marches, the Brelander is comfortable looking down on the Marcher as something less human. Likewise, the refugees from Cyre, regardless of race, are looked down upon as the biggest losers in the war that hurt everyone, and some folk think disaster struck the Cyrans because they somehow deserved it, and so they heap additional abuse on them for their assumed crimes. Culture, not physical race, is seen as justifiable cause for prejudice.

Half-orcs, often the scapegoat for anything unpleasant, most commonly hail from Droaam, the Eldeen Reaches, or the Shadow Marches, and some form part of House Tharashk. People see Droaam half-orcs as dangerous monsters and Shadow Marches half-orcs as primitives; citizens of Aundair see Reaches half-orcs (and anyone else from there) as separatists and nation-betrayers while those outside Aundair don't think about them at all. In contrast to all of this, most consider House Tharashk's half-orcs and humans to be very talented scouts with a critical skill for finding valuable resources. Again, culture and nationality is more important than actual race.

Old Races and New Races

Many typical D&D campaigns use the standard races and may include one unusual race, such as lizard-folk, aasimar, and so on. By contrast, the Eberron campaign has four new races in common play (changeling, kalashtar, shifter, and warforged). Each of these "new" races is something unusual and their role in the campaign can make many "normal" people nervous, and that can lead to racism in the strictest sense. Any member of these races is likely to run into intolerance on a regular basis, whether in urban or rural environments, from any of the older races.

Changelings are descended from humans and doppelgangers, and their natural ability to hide their true appearance means that few people ever fully trust them -- how can you confide in someone who might take on your face and use your secrets against you? Anyone who sees one in its natural form understands that it isn't really human and therefore its motives are suspect. The changeling tendency to consort with criminals only reinforces this prejudice, and in turn it means that the only place a changeling can find some acceptance is in the very criminal organizations that turn law-abiding people against them.

Kalashtar may appear physically attractive in a human sense, but their alien mind sets them apart, and while your typical adventurer is more accepting of strangeness, an average farmer or city-dweller doesn't take well to a "pretty-looking, funny-talking" kalashtar any more than someone in the modern world takes to a slick politician or book-minded ecologist telling them what's right and wrong. The kalashtar's tendency toward sincere goodness ameliorates some of their suspicion, but many people are always reminded of their ties to the Region of Dreams and the horrible quori that rule that place -- a fact that makes ignorant people fear them.

In some ways, shifters have the worst situation of all the new races. They can't pass as fully human like the changelings, they aren't beautiful and inherently good like the kalashtar, and they weren't built to be loyal soldiers like the warforged. Shifters are descended from lycanthropes, which many people consider to be monsters (and the shifters only a step above that). Crude, feral, and obviously not human, the shifters are feared by many common folk, and most shifters find themselves shunned for their appearance and mannerisms, particularly in places where the Church of the Silver Flame's crusade against lycanthropes was taken to heart.

To most people, warforged are an unfortunate reminder of the Last War. Built for combat and not for peace, the warforged race's clumsy attempts to blend in with normal society do not endear anyone to them. It doesn't help that the most famous member of their race, the Lord of Blades, has declared that the warforged shall rule Eberron, which renders all warforged as possible collaborators in this construct plot. Unlike veterans of other races, warforged can't blend in; the Last War resides in every fiber of their being. In some lands people treat them as property, and in most other places many still see them more as living weapons than as true people. Your average person is glad that no more warforged are being built (since the secret forging isn't publicly known) so that eventually this "race" will die out.

One thing to remember, though, is that the people of Eberron have a strong national identity because of decades of war, and that colors their racial perceptions; a Brelander may think that shifters are savage and changelings are untrustworthy, but a shifter or changeling from Breland is still better than anyone from Valenar or old Cyre. In many cases, nationalist bigotry is more common and accepted than racial bigotry.

Sources

The following document was compiled from public materials posted on the Official Eberron Website. Further information can be found in the Official Eberron Article archive.

Official Eberron Website – <http://www.wizards.com/default.asp?x=dnd/eberron>

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