

Stretching from horizon to horizon the scene is the same. The ground is broken and twisted, punctured by gaping fissures and marred by contorted rocks. Dark storm clouds roil, unbroken across the sky, and lit by a hellish red glow. A wind blows. Nothing stirs.

And, in the midst of it all, a single lightning-scorched tree, bare of any leaves. Three buds hang from a charred branch, embryonic and fragile, awaiting untainted rain to finally allow them to spring into life. There is not much hope left.

Gradually the eye of the observer draws back and back, leaping high into the air, and the dying tree becomes a speck, and then cannot be seen at all. The land begins to rush past, and the whistling of the wind rises. The landscape changes beneath, through shattered mountains and darkened valleys, past forests grey and sickly. Finally, a sign of habitation: a small village amidst a snow covered landscape. The humans here cling to life with tenacity, farming the infertile and tainted soil, and protected by their priest and feudal lord. But monsters prowl these lands, wild beasts and things best left unspoken. Life may continue, but once again, hope is getting thin.

This is Tyarra.

But things were not always as they were today. Go back no more than the lifetime of a single elf and the world blossomed with bountiful prosperity. The elves, dwarves, humans and halflings - and other races more elusive and fey - lived if not in total harmony, then in at least relative peace and indifference. Magic and technology had reached unprecedented heights. The dwarves were able to delve deeper than ever, and together with the humans created devices that could be powered by fire - steam engines. The elves created more and more powerful workings of high magic, and humans grew too in their ingenious applications of the sorcerous arts. It was an age of freedom, new ideas, and open sharing between the peoples.

That was before the Apocalypse. Nereven began it all when he opened the first gate. Necromancy opened the door of our world to the forces that lie beyond: the planes of *il'arahka*, *art'arfan*, and *erelech*. In the human tongue they would be rendered as Darkness, Destruction, and Decay. Regardless of their name, evil poured into the world. Demons and darkfiends, shadows and moroloth, spirit devourers and ulerar. The first created more portals for the rest and soon the world was overrun. The free peoples joined in a new alliance and so the Blood War began.

On it went, with more cities razed and under siege. Armies clashed and dark creatures rose up from the depths. The land was overturned in turmoil. Gradually, the free peoples had to retreat, abandoning more and more land. The Great Council retreated to Anostin and renamed the fort town to Eralyra - an elvish word meaning "Last Stand". The war dragged on; the scattered peoples and armies held together only by the charismatic and noble council members.

Then, on a fateful summer day, twenty-three years after the war's beginning, the forces of darkness sent an assassin. None saw this creature, or knew of its likeness, but everyone knew of its vile accomplishment: The Great Council was dead. Politics intervened as nobles struggled for power, and the alliance fell apart. The dwarves broke away from the human cities and went to reclaim their mines. The elves vanished to their hidden kingdom, Ilyana. The halflings vanished entirely.

Alone, the humans continued to fight on the surface, but victory was slipping out of their grasp. Still they refused to surrender. Tens of thousands fell in battle, and those that remained were the strongest, the most courageous. It was a time of heroes, of daring deeds - of impossible odds. Finally, the human clerics found a way to seal the portals, and a last desperate effort was launched to break through to the gates, now

numbering in the hundreds. There was a sliver of hope.

But while the humans began their final campaign, and the dwarves battled deep in the darkness, the elves watched, and discussed. Furious debates ensued as they searched for another way. Few believed the humans' plan would work against the evil forces' overwhelming strength. Finally, after six years hidden from the rest of the world, the elves voted. And by an overwhelming majority, decided to use their last resort, a high circle magic they had been creating and perfecting for ten lifetimes of man. Gathering all their strength they unleashed the Apocalypse.

And the world was destroyed. Shockwaves screamed across the land, indiscriminately destroying everything in their path. The land heaved and shook, as mountains became valleys and seas became dry land. Pillars of fire and ice fell from the sky, targeting the dark armies and ravaging the land around for miles. Explosions bloomed out of thin air, ripping the evil creatures apart. When the dust settled the world was changed.

Then the elves emerged and joined with the humans once more to finally close the portals in a last bloody series of battles. And the Blood War ended.

But many cursed the elves for what they had wrought. Tens of thousands of humans had died due to inaccurate or indifferent strikes. The land was broken and cities destroyed. Where the damage had struck hardest the air and earth was permeated with an invisible evil they simply named, 'Taint'. The atmosphere was full of dust, and the sky overcast with storms. In the three hundred years since the Apocalypse there has not yet been a sunny day.

Today, crops grow twisted and mutated, and humans fall to Taint sickness. Many creatures of the wild have become corrupted and the worst storms result in acidic rain. The world is colder and darker. The Taint has mixed with demon blood, and some are born demon touched - bearing an arm covered in scales and spines, or the head of a demon. All are killed at birth, cursed by their own parents.

The humans were not the only ones changed. Sealed into their mines by the earth shattering apocalypse, the dwarves fought on alone. Stubbornly they resisted at every turn, but eventually succumbed to the darkness below. It seeped up from the deep earth, inescapable, immortal, until they turned on each other in fear and hatred. Now the dwarves are pale and evil, and when they finally opened up their mines once more, over a hundred years later, they began war on those who had formally been their allies.

The halflings vanished entirely, and few humans believe they ever existed outside stories - if they have even heard of them at all. Similarly, the centaurs and the fey have vanished. The workings of steam power are lost, and - without the dwarves - seem unlikely to ever be recovered.

Amongst the humans, the clerics have risen to be the race's protectors. Without their cleansing prayers and blessing, the taint grows too strong for life to continue. Originally, all clerics would offer their services, asking nothing in return. But about a hundred years ago, the Church of Hector began refusing to help those who worshipped any other gods. Gradually they have risen in power until almost all villages and towns at least nominally follow the same god.

Necromancy is now outlawed, the darkest of arts. Never again will the world be plunged into the darkness - or so is the fervent prayer on most lips. But even sealed off once more, Tyarra is not free of evil. As the free peoples' grasp on the land has weakened, nameless monsters that have lain hidden for a thousand years or more are beginning to emerge once again. Vampires, shifters, and other things best left to the imagination.

It could not be worse than the reality.

Yet Tyarra is not yet lost. The elves in their longevity say that the taint is retreating gradually, and that one day the world will be free of darkness again. Now is a time for heroes to stand up and carve new legends into the face of history. Can you feel it on the wind? Three hundred years since the war ended, and change is coming. Tyarra hangs in balance and the scales can be tipped by just a few extraordinary people. But which way will things fall? Let the dice roll.

Please continue reading on the next page...

Our newest campaign is set in the post-Apocalyptic fantasy world of Tyarra. It is a land of strife and struggle, but also one of diversity, adventure, and too many adjectives. I'm mixing ideas from classic fantasy with those from typical sci-fi/post-apocalypse settings to produce something that I hope will be quite unique.

Characters

I'll be sending you more stuff with information on the races and classes of Tyarra, and how they differ from those in the Player's Handbook. But here I would like to make a few general pointers about creating characters.

- 1) Start with the idea! Don't look down the list of classes first. Instead, think of the character you would like to play totally independently of any rules set. Create a character in your head as you would for a story. Think about how they look, how they talk - what's their past? Why are they an adventurer and not a farmer? Do they have any quirks or oddities? What race are they? How does that affect the way they act, their personality?
- 2) Look down the list of classes for *inspiration*. If you're having trouble coming up with an idea you like, look at the classes in the rulebooks, not in terms of stats and numbers, but just to give you a few ideas that you might not have thought of by yourself.
- 3) Figure out how to turn your idea into an actual D&D class/multi-class. Unless you're Jonny or one of the other experienced players you'll probably want to come to me at that point and I'll help you out. Together, we'll create you a character sheet and generate all the stats you'll need.
- 4) Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I want you all to write a brief biography of your character. It should be at least 300 words - I won't set a maximum. That may sound like a lot of work for something that's meant to be fun, but hear me out. 300 words is only about half a page of size 12 typed writing, and you're all on holiday right now. Something I have learned from online roleplaying is that this is one of the best ways to really define your character.

Things to think about as you write your bio: Firstly, it should be a story: brief, third person and not very involved, yes, but a story. The best ones will show character development - how they change over time. This may be a traumatic event in their youth or something more gradual. It should explore your past, and your reasons for adventuring (motivation). A good way of structuring it is to think of four or five key events in the character's past and then write a short paragraph about each. Then end with a final paragraph about their recent past and how they came to be where they are now.

I will help anyone who wants help, and don't worry if you're not very good at writing - the aim is not to produce a wonderful piece of prose (although that would be great!) but to get you to understand your character better. [Link to my character development essay]

Anyone who really feels this is far too much to expect, we can discuss it, but I really think it will help the campaign a lot. I will be in London to help create characters from the 11th to the 17th of August. Anything outside of that will have to be done by e-mail. If Jonny is around he can help with ruling issues about stats, and the technical side of creating a character (if he has free time - don't feel pressured dude).

If you want to adapt a character from a previous campaign, that's probably okay, but talk to me about it. Everyone will be starting at level 2 in this campaign.

Rules

At this point I'm still abroad, and I want to see how my money holds out, but I'm thinking of buying some new rulebooks. You can use any classes/prestige classes from the following. Those that are marked with an asterisk are ones that I haven't bought (yet).

Player's Handbook

Dungeon Master's Guide

Expanded Psionics Handbook

Manual of the Planes [Talk to me first]

*Player's Handbook 2

*Heroes of Horror

For races I'm going to be a bit more restrictive. Please choose from:

Human

Elf

Dwarf (rebel)

Half-elf

Halfling (no more than one in the group)

In addition, some characters may be demon-touched (see the race document for info). Another possibility to consider is that one character may be suffering from the Taint disease, which could make for some interesting roleplaying. If there is a race that I haven't included but you really feel you want to play don't hesitate to ask me. In fact, in a more general sense, feel free to follow your inspiration in creating these characters. If that means coming up with an idea for the world (a place, a spell, a language, a cult, whatever) go for it! I may have to adapt it to fit Tyarra, or in the worse case forbid it - but try and see, and you might just end up creating a bit of the campaign.

As you can imagine, that's quite a lot of possibilities. For the guys who have only roleplayed in Vennox's group, I suggest that you use classes and races from the standard Player's Handbook, rather than overwhelm you with mountains of stuff. The more veteran players who have seen pretty much every class in the PHB will probably want to try something new. But remember - idea first! Then the rules behind it.

I'm also thinking of buying the Spell Compendium, which has half a gazillion new spells for all the spell using classes. So if you'd like to be a mage, but have been getting bored of magic missiles, there may be something new for you to play with.

Thanks for patiently reading your way through this, and please don't hesitate to ask me anything you're unsure of. I look forward to seeing what you come with, and to actually playing this thing!