

FIVE OATHS

Setting Supplement One

This document provides some new information on Tirneach, as well as collecting information that was previously made available in more disparate ways.

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Philosophies of the Church of the Shaper

The Church of the Shaper is a flexible institution that accommodates many varying interpretations of its basic doctrine. Some of these are broad trends in how the fundamental teachings are interpreted and applied, others are more fixed and specific ideas and a few require their adherents to truly set themselves apart from Tirneach's society at large. Some examples of these include:

Devotionists and Holistics

One of the most basic questions the children of the Shaper face is how best to pursue virtue. Some, the Devotionists, argue that it is best to focus oneself on the full understanding and attainment of a small selection of the Shaper's Virtues, with some even arguing that a person can only truly be committed to a single virtue. Others, the Holistics, insist that this is folly and that to live a truly virtuous life one must remember and embody all of the Shaper's Virtues.

The maintenance of the Orders with their principle virtues demonstrates a slight Devotionist tendency in the mainstream Church, however, most cinnire agree that to ignore any virtue completely is to stray from the Shaper's path.

Hierarchicalists and Individualists

The society of Tirneach is a stratified one in which Loyalty and Duty are highly valued for pragmatic, as well as moral reasons. Hierarchicalists believe that it is not just one's material life, but also one's spiritual life that should be guided by these social structures. Adherents of this philosophy teach that the will of the Shaper is revealed most clearly to Réig who in turn instructs the Iarlas, who instruct the Riders, who instruct the people. Individualists on the other hand maintain that no living mortal is more qualified than any other to receive the will of the Shaper, and encourage all believers to develop their own personal understanding of and relationship with them.

The cynical sometimes observe that the closer one gets to Corroch, the Réig, and the Prelates Council, the more Hierarchicalists one encounters; while in the towns and villages of Tirneach every cinnire seems to teach Individualism. In truth, both of these perspectives are important to the mainstream Church with Hierarchicalism serving it well at the macro level and Individualism on the personal.

Protectionists and Antagonists

Even in the typically plural Church of the Shaper some teachings are deemed to be heretical. Protectionists claim that it is the duty of the cinnirí to uncover and eradicate sources of heretical teachings so as to safeguard the people of Tirneach from being led astray and into spiritual danger. Antagonists argue that no living mortal is truly qualified to know the absolute truth of the Shaper and so it is folly to discard and destroy teachings that could, with time and understanding, prove to contain some truth. Heretics, they say, should be engaged with scrutiny and argument, not blade and torch.

The mainstream church has a strong Protectionist tendency, with hardline Antagonists typically found only among the most detached scholars and fringe radicals.

Cogadh gan Crioich and Cogadh le Crioich (*kuh-gah gon kree-ock, kuh-gah le kree-ock*)

These two doctrines, named in the old-tongue, translate as “war without end” and “war with an end” respectively. One of the more purely philosophical divisions within the Church, this distinction refers to whether or not it is believed that the Gwyllt can ever be truly defeated in the mortal world. Adherents to the principle of Cogadh gan Crioich believe that it is the lot of mortals to struggle with the Gwyllt for all eternity and that they may only truly know peace and the perfect embrace of the Shaper in death. Believers in the Cogadh le Crioich believe that the Gwyllt can be driven from the mortal world completely, a victory that would allow the presence of the Shaper to return to it and usher in an eternity of peace and perfection.

Much ink, and occasionally some blood, has been spilled over this debate. Although it has little impact on the average person’s day-to-day life, many of the most intense arguments between cinnirí centre on this issue. In the Order of Torchbearers particularly, this divide is the basis of a deep and bitter factionalism. Currently, Cogadh gan Crioich is the more mainstream position but this has changed before and will change again.

Annihilationists and Eternalists, Redemptionists and Consumptionists

Even with access to necromantic rituals, much debate still persists about what precisely happens to a soul after death. All followers of the Shaper agree that a virtuous soul will, in due course, find its way to the Shaper’s embrace. However, what becomes of imperfect or malicious souls is a far less settled matter. Annihilationists believe that these souls, unable to join with the Shaper, waste away over time until they eventually cease to exist with no trace of them remaining. Eternalists on the other hand believe that the

unvirtuous simply remain in the space between the mortal world and the Shaper's Halls for all time, never able to truly return or to pass on.

Redemptionists believe that with enough time the stain of mortal life fades from the soul and eventually even the least virtuous may become one with the Shaper. This is a controversial view point, not just because of the implications for individuals who remain contactable by ritual long after their death, but because it brings into question the necessity of living a virtuous life. Finally, there are the Consumptionists who teach that imperfect and malicious souls are drawn to and consumed by the Gwyllt after death and thereby empower the enemy.

The matter of Annihilationism versus Eternalism is largely unsettled, with both sides arguing that the available evidence supports their position. The mainstream position of the church is to guide conversation away from what becomes of the unvirtuous and towards the attainment of virtue, believing that the question should never become relevant. Redemptionism is considered heretical as it is deemed likely to lead followers astray. Consumptionism is a fringe theory, considered distasteful at best even if not outright heretical.

Nocturnalists

A small but distinctive movement of Shaper worship, the Nocturnalists have elevated the dichotomy between the Sun and the Moon to be their guiding principle. The sect aims to avoid the light of the Sun, which they refer to as the Eye of the Gwyllt, completely and remain indoors or underground during daylight hours whenever possible. On nights with a full moon, they gather outdoors at ritual circles for ecstatic ceremonies. The largest and most long-lived Nocturnalist groups tend to be found in Draiod, either below ground or in the peculiar riding of Spellshade.

The mainstream view is that the Nocturnalists are harmless, if misguided. Some cinnirí believe they should be dissuaded from such onerous and unnecessary restrictions wherever possible.

Perfectionists

All in Tirneach are taught to build communities that encourage and exemplify the Shaper's virtues, some believe that this is the highest calling of the Shaper's followers and that nothing about the effort can be left to chance or circumstance. These Perfectionists build settlements dedicated to the rigorous pursuit of virtue in all parts of life. Each Perfectionist community, called a Termonn (*termun*), is idiosyncratic in their approach to

their mission as they are strongly shaped by interpretations and intentions of their founding members. Some prominent Termonns include:

Pilgrim's Rest

A long standing Termonn in Vercontin's Pass between Uasa and Draiod. Dedicated to helping pilgrims travelling to the Way of Wisdom prepare for the trial. The founder of Pilgrim's Rest believed that true virtue is found in service and the support of virtue in others. The Termonn accepts all initiates who are willing to live by its rules.

The Shaper's School

An unusual Termonn near Iomra, based on the belief that the land of Tirneach itself is intended to be a lesson from the Shaper. This Termonn is laid out as a model of Tirneach in miniature, with each realm represented by a portion of the settlement. The population size and balance of species is also managed to reflect, at least in theory, the relative populations of the realms. It is intended that after having the chance to perfect their understanding of the Shaper in this controlled environment, the members of this Termonn will travel to the realm corresponding to the district they have lived in and share the benefit of their studies. In practice initiates tend to be very quick or very slow to leave the Shaper's School.

The Crucible

Founded in the belief that virtue practised in comfort and security is no virtue at all, this nomadic Termonn camps deep in the Great Forest. They accept all initiates but are uncompromising in their warning that those seeking a life of violence for the sake of violence will be left behind. The members of the Crucible live in daily battle with the Gwyllt not out of wrath or bloodlust but to perfect the practice of the Shaper's virtues in the most extreme of circumstances.

The Stone Cloister

The focal point for the Faith of Stone, a philosophy that teaches that the Fathach are made by the Shaper and not the Vartach. This almost exclusively Fathach community is diverse in the specifics of its practices and beliefs though most refer in some way to The Stone Below. Some come here simply for the community of other Fathach.

The leader of a Termonn is the Erenagh (*eh-rin-nog*), in the first generation this role is usually filled by the individual whose vision and teaching has brought the Termonn together. In many Termonns this title is shared

between founding members or elected from among its members. Having a successful and productive Termonn on their lands can be a boon to the prosperity of a Riding as it becomes a centre of trade or expertise. Having a troublesome or fractious Termonn can become a persistent thorn in a Rider's side and so most are cautious about granting land for their establishment.

Termonns are officially a respected form of worship however, many cinnire view more radical settlements with suspicion or exasperation.

The Nature of Heresy

Traditionally, a belief or philosophy will be declared heresy by the Prelates Council if it either places another entity on par with the Shaper or if it threatens to lead well-meaning believers to unvirtuous conclusions and purposes.

Some heresies are simple things, such as the Heresy of Androgyny, so declared as it is the belief of the church that thinking of the Shaper in such limited terms as male or female warps a mortal's understanding of their true nature. Other heresies are the product of particular moments in history, such as the Heresy of Dhá Bhás (gaw vawss) which was declared shortly after Krieger began settling in Tirneach to discourage the idea that Krieger go to a separate afterlife from other species. The Shaper's virtues and teachings are intended to be universal and it was feared that this may have been the thin end of a splintering wedge. It remains the position of the church that Glüch lies fully within the Shaper's Hall. Some of these declarations have had their historical context fully lost, no living cinnire or even necromancer has been able to discover the meaning of the Heresy of the Stars but it was recorded that the teachings of a cinnire named Toirdealbhach (*tchor-luck*) should be given precedence in all matters referring to it.

More dangerous than the simply theologically misleading are Heretical Conspiracies, organised movements that seek to undermine the worship of the Shaper and the society built upon it. These are commonly considered to be the product of Gwyllt interference, however the cinniri know that there are other beguiling voices that mortal minds may fall victim to and that a charismatic mortal can be just as damaging in the right place and time as any supernatural threat. The Prelates Council works to detect, uncover, and destroy these conspiracies but they often prove surprisingly insidious and resilient. If enough can be learned about a conspiracy and its members, the council has access to powerful rituals that can and will be used against them for the good of the Shaper's Flock.

Traditions of Ritual Magic

The Church of the Shaper teaches that knowledge of ritual magic was gifted to Mortals by the Shaper themselves. This knowledge has been passed down within the Church for centuries and comprises a canon of rituals, the methods for training ritualists, and the techniques required for developing new rituals.

The development of new rituals is difficult, dangerous, and only rarely successful. The process often involves unintended consequences and the uncontrolled release of massive amounts of magical energy. It is the position of the Church that it is foolish hubris for Mortals to attempt ritual magic without the intercession of the Shaper to guide the process. Despite this, there continue traditions of ritual magic outside the auspices of the Church. The least controversial and most well accepted of these is the ancient ritual used in the creation of Fathach. At the other end of the spectrum are the profane rituals used by Grave-Robbers, and the unholy rites of the Gwyllt.

Sitting at a somewhat uncomfortable middle point are the rituals developed through arcane magical research. Arcane theory teaches that it is the mind of the ritualist alone that directs the effects of ritual magic and that no other intercessions are necessary. The Church rejects this idea and argues that if arcane ritualists are not seeking aid from the Shaper then they are either gambling with their lives and the lives of those around them or they are unwittingly receiving aid from, and coming under the influence of, more dangerous forces.

The practice and development of arcane rituals is not widespread but continues in spite of the disapproval of the Church. The usefulness of arcane researchers and practitioners in general has made it politically undesirable for the Prelates Council to declare the practice entirely heretical. Some members of the Orders, particularly amongst the Torchbearers, argue for a more pragmatic approach and have demonstrated willingness in the past to collaborate with arcane ritualists for the greater good of Tirneach. It is entirely possible for ritualists of either tradition to successfully perform the rituals of the other, though they may find the forms unfamiliar or personally distasteful.

The Nature and Limits of Magical Healing

Many novices of magical theory are surprised to discover that healing spells do not rely on the transformative powers of Transmutation, or even the coursing energies of Evocation, but rather on the beguiling nature of Enchantment. Seasoned warriors, weary pit fighters, and workers in dangerous professions however are all too aware of this quirk of the healing arts.

So called healing by magical means acts far more upon the mind of the recipient than it does upon their body. The capacity of mortal tenacity to overcome pain and adversity can be remarkable even when completely unaided and it is upon this capacity that healing spells rely. Under the influence of Enchantment, the mind can power through wounds that even the most tenacious warrior could not normally ignore. That is not to say that no true healing occurs, charged with magical energy the mind can produce startling effects in the body. Flows of blood are stemmed, dizziness and headache recede, wounds begin to repair as though hours were passing instead of minutes.

This of course only enables more risks to be taken, more foes to be met, more damage to be sustained. There is a reason that Tirneach's professional warriors, the Galloglaigh bands, typically take to the field only a few times each year. Once the battle is done and the danger is passed, the body presents its bill. Magical healing makes it possible to survive the unsurvivable and keep on fighting but it cannot completely remove the toll that takes on a mortal body. Anyone who has received extensive magical healing knows all too well the long and aching process of true healing that begins mere days after that initial flush of seeming invincibility.

Magical healing has its limits, a body can be so drained of life or badly damaged that no amount of convincing will get it back on its feet. It is also difficult for Enchantment to overcome severe structural damage, the mind may be willing and inured to pain but the base mechanics of movement sometimes just can't be ignored. Poisons that disrupt the body's internal processes and deep internal wounds, far from the awareness of the conscious mind are also known to pose problems for healing spells.

The warriors of Tirneach rely on healing magic to do their work and most of them owe their life to a healer who was in the right place at the right time but they also respect its limits and know that each wound ignored will eventually demand its due.

Marriage in Tirneach

Many different forms of legal and social unions exist in Tirneach; with different realms, communities, and social classes having their own peculiar forms and conventions. These unions are not considered a religious matter, although the church does encourage many forms as being useful to community and ambition, and cinnirí are often asked to preside over and witness the oaths of union. Family heads, local Tiarnaí, or other well respected figures are also sometimes asked to preside. Individual unions are defined by tradition with the details filled in by personal negotiation. Several characteristics of these unions are common across Tirneach:

They are concerned with the relative wealth and status of the participants.

It is common for quite different standards, expectations, and legal consequences to apply depending on whether the individuals concerned are considered to be of equal or disparate status. Individuals who enter into unions with a spouse far wealthier than them usually have their power over their joint affairs seriously curtailed in comparison to a union of equal status.

They are not permanent.

Almost all marriages in Tirneach can be ended at-will by either member, with them taking away all property they brought into the marriage and equal share of all property that was gained during it. If someone believes their spouse has wronged them, they may take a legal claim against them to dissolve the union under more punitive terms. Some unions are explicitly time-limited to begin with, perhaps lasting for a year-and-a-day, or lasting until a particular goal has been reached, such as the birth of a child or the destruction of a common enemy.

They are not exclusive.

So long as the terms of the individual agreements do not fundamentally conflict, there is no prohibition or taboo against being involved in multiple different unions. In cases where conflict does arise between the rights and responsibilities conferred by different unions, pre-existing agreements are given priority.

They do not create a new family.

The members of the union are still considered to be part of their family of origin and are still answerable to the head of that family. Individuals who wish to join their spouse's family must be adopted in. If children are

expected to be produced by a union it should be agreed upon from the start which family they will belong to. It is not required that all children produced by a union belong to the same family.

Some particular examples include:

Union of Joint Purpose

This type of union requires both parties to commit their resources and act as a single entity towards the completion of a specified goal. The goal can be simple and personal (such as the production of an heir for one or other family), they can be distinctly impersonal (such as the establishment of new guild or trade-route), or they can be far-ranging and aspirational (such as the complete settlement of the Great Forest). These unions are dissolved upon completion of their goal.

Torchbearer's Union

Many Torchbearers enter into a union with their partner that allows them to act on behalf of the other in matters of law and family. If not dissolved, the obligations of the union last past the death of one of its members and see the surviving member fulfilling the duties of their lost partner.

A Marriage of Contest

A form of union passed down from the days of the Amber Hall. Under the terms of contest the wealth of each partner is reckoned separately every five years, with the wealthier partner being given the privileges of higher status as if they had entered the union unequally. Usually the status of prospective partners is reckoned only approximately but in a Marriage of Contest every last pingin is counted. Currently unfashionable, some among the Teachers of Baol encourage this form of Union for its promotion of Ambition, Prosperity, and Perseverance.

Ruby Marriage

An unusual and restrictive form of legal union practised by the Ruby Families. Intended to act as a powerful symbolic gesture to end feuds between families, a Ruby Marriage defies many of the social conventions of Tirneach. The participants must be of equal status and the unions are permanent, insoluble, and exclusive.

Union of Dedication

Sometimes derisively called a “Peasant’s Wedding”, this form of union is most common amongst those who have no concerns of property, title or grand ambition. These unions are most concerned with personal and communal commitment and the celebration of particular relationships.

Adoption in Tirneach

Adoption is a common practice in Tirneach as there have always been many title or property holding individuals and couples who cannot produce heirs unaided. To have an adoption formally recognised the adoptee (who could be a child or an adult) and the adopter (who must be an adult) are required to go before their Iarla and make solemn declarations. The adoptee must renounce any and all claims to the property and titles of their birth family and the adopter must accept the responsibility of a parent for the conduct of their new child. Following this there is no legal or social distinction between a child born into or adopted into a family.

Amongst those who place a high value on lineage, such as the Ruby Families of Siabhal, insinuating that there ought be a distinction made, or that adopted children are not truly of the family is socially disastrous. All of the Ruby Families have at one time or another relied on adoption to continue their legacies and an attack on the legitimacy of a single adopted heir is considered an attack on all.

Many families without inheritance to worry about practice informal adoption, as an audience with the Iarla may be more trouble than it is worth to them. It is considered an attack tantamount to the theft of the child to adopt someone who has been given as a hostage to your family. Finally, it is a contentious but not unheard of practice for the head of a household to adopt an heir more pleasing to them if they are completely unsatisfied with the one's nature has provided to them.

The Ruby Court

The Ruby Court is an ancient institution made up of the high families of Siabhal, most of whom claim descent from one of the Hundred Heroes of legend. While it hasn't had official standing since the days before the First Réig, the high families still proudly claim the title of Ruby Courtier. The Ruby Court is synonymous with high society, status and influence in Siabhal.

The Ruby Court is sometimes looked upon with scepticism by the more direct and pragmatic minds of the other Realms. Even the bureaucrats of Uasa and the scholars of Draoid find it hard to fathom the subtle power of the Ruby Families, and while few can deny that they have helped keep Siabhal safe, stable, and prosperous in centuries past, there are those who criticise them as a relic of a bygone era that undermines the authority of the Tiarnaí.

To the outside observer, the families of the Ruby Court spend most of their time at leisure. Scarcely a week passes without one family or another hosting a hunt, tournament, feast, or other diversion. It is on these social battlefields however that the future leaders of the Realm are honed and skilled courtiers can wield the power of a guestlist against their rivals as brutally as a Highlander of Baol might deploy a raid. The Ruby Families never shy away from bringing violence against interlopers, traitors, the undead, or the Gwyllt; but outside of personal duels, resorting to force of arms to establish dominance over another of their number is tantamount to admitting defeat. Sometimes of course, the spoils of battle are worth the loss of face.

The families of the court fall into three tiers, known as Circles. The least prestigious of these is known as the Scarlet Circle, the highest is the Carmine Circle, while the bulk of families lie in the middle tier of the Crimson Circle.

The Scarlet Circle

The Scarlet Circle contains families whose claim to descent from the Hundred Heroes is acknowledged but who have not maintained significant political or economic success. The efforts of these families turn mostly to gaining entry to the Crimson Circle, though at times their situation is such that they can look towards little beyond keeping up appearances. Such efforts often lead them to be the most visibly involved in local affairs, volunteering for responsibilities in the less prestigious Ridings that are not already sewn up by the more influential families and being especially eager to help new Riders. It is often said that behind the most generous

charitable acts in Siabhal is a Scarlet family looking for favours worth far more than Pingin. Those of the Scarlet Circle who join the Galloglaigh are noted particularly for their ambition.

The Crimson Circle

The families of the Crimson Circle do most of the work of actually running Siabhal, all the while fending off attempts to undermine their position from the Scarlet Circle and contending with one another for entry to the Carmine Circle. The practical power of these families comes not just from their wealth and connections but from the responsibility they are given for administering logistics and infrastructure within the realm.

Ambitious Scarlet Circle families will always have an eye out for Crimson Circle families who are not living up to their duties, in the hopes of convincing the Tiarnaí to transfer the authority to them. To earn their place in the Carmine Circle these families must prove themselves not just capable of producing a single talented generation but an enduring dynasty of skilled and farsighted courtiers.

The Carmine Circle

The Carmine Circle holds the most prestigious families of the Ruby Court. All of the longest standing members of this Circle claim descent from Finian the Brave and use the names of later ancestors to differentiate themselves. It is unusual for members of the main lines of any of these families to be directly involved in administration but their influence and oversight is felt everywhere in the Realm. It is a rare occasion for a new family to be welcomed to the Carmine Circle.

Status and Recognition

There exists no formal list of which families fall into which Circle and there are no specific criteria for entry to each. Inclusion in any given Circle is instead based on consensus and families are just as likely to move down through the circles as up. For this reason a family hoping to rise in status must make their claim indisputable, it must be clear to everyone in which Circle they truly belong. Additionally, it helps to have a sponsor in the upper circle willing to take a chance on acknowledging them. A Crimson Circle family that invites a Scarlet Circle family to a gathering of Crimson guests may be congratulated on their eye for talent as the lower family rises up by consensus or they may lose face as their Crimson peers doubt their judgement. A member of the Carmine circle who acknowledges a Scarlet family as rightfully sitting in the Crimson circle would rarely be questioned but such an act would represent a significant investment of influence.

It is not unheard of for families without claims to storied lineage who have achieved great wealth or influence to “discover” a previously overlooked connection to one of the Hundred Heroes in their family tree.

Occasionally a genealogist working for a more established family might unearth the connection, the revelation of which is a gift to the upstart family that is not soon forgotten.

The Hundred Heroes

The Hundred Heroes are part of the folklore of Siabhal, and together the tales of their adventures are known as the Legend of Lobhan. The following list is not an exhaustive tally of all the Hundred Heroes. We welcomed submissions from our players to add to the Hundred Heroes' ranks, and where the players agreed we have shared their names. Thanks a million to everyone who submitted a Hero, and remember if you want to play a Siabhlach character you can propose a Hero they are descended from in your player background.

The Smiths

The Hundred Heroes bore weapons and wore armour which were almost as famous as the Heroes themselves. Siabhal culture has always valued skill at artifice, so the creators of these magic items were attributed great renown in the Legend of Lobhan. Some of them took the extra step of joining the fight against the Gwyllt and are numbered among the Hundred Heroes. Those Ruby Families who claim descent from Smiths are often still involved in crafting, whether as patrons or as master crafters.

Niall, whose hammer sings

Three versions of Niall appear throughout stories, allowing listeners of all ages to identify with him at different points. Most common, particularly in stories for children, is the eager smith's apprentice who hung up his apron to follow Finian on the road — whether the hero willed it or not. Filled with too many stories and too little sense, the boy's overconfidence gets the heroes into trouble as often as his earnest honesty seems to get them out. More plot device than character, the full-grown Niall is a journeyman smith and experimental tinkerer. He often hands the protagonist a piece of wildly specific equipment near the start of a tale that ultimately helps the hero win the day by the end. The elder Niall is a master smith, whose speed and stamina have declined as his strength and skills have grown. The source of several legendary weapons, such as Duskbringer and Fhrisnéis, he mostly dispenses wisdom and friendly jibes to characters who echo his younger self.

Niall is almost always represented as human, though his association with fire, his notable ageing, and the characteristic foolhardiness of his youth make him a popular character among Firetouched growing up in Siabhal.

Submitted by Philip

Steelscale Conrad, Breaker of Chains

Conrad was a Drakeblooded who suffered from an unexplained ailment that caused their scales to become malformed and absent in patches, leading them to forge scales of steel to fill the gaps – which earned them the moniker of ‘Steelscale’. They are often taciturn and aloof in the stories they appear in.

They first appear in stories as a background character, a smith providing weapons and armour to the heroes but they would eventually join the host of Finian’s company. They first came to Finian’s aid when he went to accost a Gwyllt, a foul amalgam of chain and flesh that ensnared many of the heroes and sought to drag them to their deaths, in a bog on the border of Uasa. Conrad emerged from the evening mists and set about shattering the chains that held the companions with a mighty warhammer before turning their attention to the beast itself and laying it low. Many stories after this focus on them destroying bindings, freeing captives, or breaking a key structure of the enemy.

Despite being a Drakeblooded, the prevalence of breaking chains as a positive symbol in their stories has made Conrad an icon to many young Broken Chain Vartach.

Micheál the Reforger (*mee-hall*)

A blacksmith and builder of peerless quality, Michael was a tireless staple of Finian’s Court. It was said that even an ordinary weapon struck by his hammer was blessed with exceptional durability and longevity, a quality Michael himself was known for as he was an exceptionally long-lived Creidhe.

Though he often features in the background of stories around combat, Micheál’s most renowned stories feature not him, but other heroes wielding his specially crafted magical weapons and tools, from sturdy Bristenhammer that could raise a city in one day, to the dread Oicheneach, the Night Spear. Most of Michael’s creations were lost long ago, and many a Gallóglagh band has been paid in the hopes of finding even one of these legendary weapons.

Submitted by Jack

The Wild Wanderers

While the deep forests of Siabhal were the haunt of the Gwyllt, some of the bravest Siabhlaigh in ancient times fought the Gwyllt in their dens. While the Hundred Heroes are generally seen as a civilising force against the chaotic emnity of the Gwyllt, these Hundred Heroes serve as a reminder that the wild places too had to be reclaimed from the Gwyllt’s foul influence. While there are Ruby Families who claim descent from these

Heroes at the forefront of civil life in Iomra and Barr, descendants of the Wild Wanderers are more likely to be found in farther flung parts of Siabhal.

Féilim, Who Walked Among the Beasts (*fay-lim*)

Féilim came to join the hundred heroes when one of their number – usually Siún – is facing down a large pack of wild animals who can not be tamed by any magic. Fearing the beasts to be touched by the Gwylt, they prepare to do battle, but for the arrival of a wild man clothed only in animal hide, who counsels them to lay down their arms, and show that they mean no harm. With some cajoling, they do so, and after a time the beasts lower their hackles, and eventually go on their way. Once the pack had moved on, the wild man introduces himself as Féilim, and declares that he'll stick around to keep them out of trouble, and usually proceeds to do exactly the opposite before the end of the tale. Further appearances of Féilim are characterised by a staunch dedication to protecting the beasts of forest and field from Gwylt and man alike.

Féilim is depicted as either a Leasair or Human, usually corresponding to whether his role in the tale is that of wisdom or exuberance

Submitted by Aonghus

Immovable Láimhiarrainn and Sly Cruachín (*lawv-ear-un, crew-uck-een*)

Two heroes who almost exclusively appear in stories together, Láimhiarrainn and Cruachín, were parent and child. The tales say that Láimhiarrainn encountered Cruachín as a feral child in the mountains of Siabhal and brought the strange youngster before Finian the Brave to declare they would be adopting the child and training them to become a great warrior. Legends which feature Cruachín as a young child usually centre around Láimhiarrainn having to track down and rescue Cruachín after they have followed their curiosity into some dangerous place or situation. As Cruachín ages they are most commonly shown tricking or outwitting their enemies and on a number of occasions must rely on their guile to rescue Láimhiarrainn from a powerful foe. Láimhiarrainn is typically described as a living mountain or an animated statue, while Cruachín is described only as having the darkest hair and the brightest eyes. Láimhiarrainn earned his nickname by single handedly holding a bridge against a horde of Gwylt invaders while Cruachín ran ahead to warn the nearby towns of their approach.

Láimhiarrainn is traditionally identified as a rare Fathach wanderer in Siabhal while Cruachín's species is left entirely up to the story teller.

The Companions

The exact composition of the Hundred Heroes seems to vary depending on who you ask, and some Heroes are known only in certain localities or to those families who claim descent from them. These Heroes most often appear as companions to Finian the Brave or other more major figures in the Legend of Lobhan. Their descendents are likely to be no less proud of their origins, after all even the least of the Hundred Heroes is still a Hero in their own right.

Sé of the silver eye (*shay*)

Sé met the heroes — though which heroes vary with the telling — in a tavern. Or at a feast. Or around a campfire. Either way, there were people and music, and money changing hands. Sé had been a travelling trader, and lost everything in the Gwyllt attack which left him with his trademark silver eye. Since then he had been winning drinks, dinner, and the odd coin in games of wits against people whose fortunes were little better. After most of the heroes had lost coins or drinks to him in games of cards, riddles, or strategy, Finian — or sometimes another leading hero — approached him and offered him a greater purpose toward which he might employ those skills. Sé's role in the stories is usually to talk: He persuades a local noble to join the heroes in battle; he gathers a group of farmers to rebuild a road, or repair a fortification; he talks a bandit leader into siding with the people they've been robbing, against the Gwyllt.

Sé's species is generally at the discretion of the storyteller, though he is always just on the far side of middle age for whichever species he may be.

Submitted by Philip

Lyra Blackthorn, the Carer of All

Lyra was a field Wildling with a visage of black thorns and piercing amber eyes. Many assumed from their solitary tendencies that they were cold and uncaring, but this could not be further from the truth. Lyra was also known as a solid defender, and it was said that once they planted their feet it was impossible to move them from that spot no matter the force or how hard they were struck. Most stories about Lyra involve them defending a bridge, mountain pass, or small village against impossible odds until the other Heroes can arrive to reinforce them and vanquish the foe. In many of the stories the only survivors are a group of children, orphaned by the Gwyllt's assault. These stories always end the same way, with one of the heroes asking what would happen to the children and Lyra, confused that any decision needed to be made, telling those present, 'I

will care for them, they shall have my name to show I defend them, and that they are part of the Blackthorn family.'

Submitted by Stuart

Ultan of the Valley

Few epic poems or famous songs are written about Ultan of The Valley. No one even knows which valley they hail from. However Ultan may be the hero who appears in the most works, always in a supporting role. When Saoirse slew the Gibbering Hound, it was Ultan that distracted it. When Cormac The Red and a dozen warriors held the Drywind Pass, Ultan was one of the dozen. And when Tyrone lost his duel with Keira the Many-Hearted, it was Ultan that carried the body home. Many were the heroes that called Ultan friend, though some scholars claim that Ultan was simply a common name at the time, or was added in later tellings to make The Hundred Heroes seem more united than they truly were. Of course the scholars who make that claim take great care to never voice those opinions around those who can trace their lineage back to Ultan or any of the Heroes they were said to have aided.

The majority of those who claim descent from Ultan are Human, though their own species is never explicitly stated.

Submitted by Jonathan

Lorcan Rua

Lorcan Rua is a tragic figure among the hundred heroes. A young warrior, he is typically not the focus of any story but rather the victim, often willing, of a danger at hand. There are many tales depicting the grim trials or death of Lorcan. Some learned cinnirí suggest that Lorcan Rua is a name given to a host of unknown dead, lost to the vagaries of war, but the typical lay storyteller will have a favourite tale of Lorcan Rua they maintain is the truth with all others being misattributed or simply wrong. When he appears in a tale Lorcan will typically offer himself up to save a comrade, whether by holding the line to give them time to retreat or paying the ultimate price for another hero's misdeeds. His pain or death typically spurs other heroes to further greatness but in some melancholy tales his suffering is without meaning or relief, reflecting the dark days the hundred heroes lived in. In modern tales Lorcan often prophesises the coming of the Shaper as he dies.

Lorcan Rua is often identified as a Human, good-hearted but reckless, but is also seen as a selfless Creidhe by some.

Órfhaiche, who turned the Earth (*or-fih-ha*)

Órfhaiche rarely features in tales of derring do, though some storytellers credit her as saving more lives than any other hero. Her most common role is to serve as the call to action in other heroes' stories, being the wealthy landowner or village leader who summons Finian's companions to solve some great problem, with that other companion's heroism being the focus of the story. She held the ball where Cathal and Barra became betrothed after a night of comic misunderstandings, she sent for Lyra when the smoking horde marched on Cheilg, and when glistening skinless Gwyllt stalked the fields she called for Conlaoch the sword eater to slay them with his bare hands. Scholars have in recent years begun obsessing over the minor details introduced as preamble to whatever disaster needs the intervention of the other heroes, ranging from bartering with the Uasaigh tribes for the knowledge of bringing water to dry land, to being the one to first develop a three-field crop rotation system to preserve the fertility of the land.

Due to her association with agriculture and appearances in even the earliest tales, she is usually identified as a Leasiar.

The Brash

Against the Gwyllt, martial virtue was often the deciding factor in whether Siabhal was wiped from the face of Tirneach or not. These Hundred Heroes are among the most celebrated and ferocious of warriors, sometimes to their own detriment. Siabhlaigh who descend from them are quite commonly found among the gallóglagh bands, eager to make their own name and live up to their ancestors' legacy.

Conlaoch the Sword Eater (*conlock*)

Also styled as the Bold or the Fearless, his origins vary from story to story, in some he was a wolf who became a Forest Wildling under the full moon, or a Field Wildling boy who rallied his friends to fight off a Gwyllt, armed with nothing but sticks. Some forgo any history and introduce him mid-battle, adorned only in the blood of his enemies. A hulking, brutish fighter who preferred to fight bare handed, with little in common with Finian's other companions save their hatred of the Gwyllt – while he often appears out of the blue to rescue a less martial hero from the Gwyllt, more than one tale focuses on arguments between Conlaoch and other cooler-headed Heroes, which come to blows until he can be tricked or mollified. The most notable is the day Conlaoch challenged Finian, declaring them weak and unsuited to lead the companions, leading to a duel. When Finian is about to deal the fatal blow and lop off Conlaoch's head he catches the blade between

his teeth and breaks it. This settles the matter, and stories set after this event normally show a more respectful Conlaoch, though one whose fury in battle is undimmed.

Composite of submissions by Tyrone & Eimhin

Cathal Dearg & Barra Buí, the Spear and the Shield (*caw-hul jarrug, barra bwee*)

Always appearing together, these lovers travelled widely, fighting both the Gwyllt and any other threat to Siabhall. Their tales tend to fall into two categories. The first stresses their teamwork in battle. Cathal fought with no thought whatsoever for defence, tearing wildly through foe after foe and shattering spear after spear upon their armour. Barra acted as his protector and spear-carrier, using his tactical instincts and Creidhe gifts to keep his reckless human lover alive and armed. Every single strike pierced three foes and shattered the weapon besides. It is said that Barra could mend a weapon simply by twirling it around his fingers, and throw it to Cathal as fast, while his own shield was unbreakable. The second is comedic, playing up the common stereotypes of humans and Creidhe. These tales are never of battle, but instead feature an endless variety of domestic and social situations where their wildly different personalities would lead to hilarity: meeting the other's foster parents, both being asked to protect a ball against intrigue, and one rescuing another from a misunderstanding are common themes. In every tale, the lovers are completely inseparable, and both frustrated and deeply delighted by their partner's perspective on life.

Submitted by Steve Kenneally

Siún, Who Lept the Flaming Wall (*shoon*)

Said to have known Finian the Brave since childhood, Siún is best known for her brash, impetuous nature. Legends about Siún tend to fall into one of two patterns: in the first, Siún is the source of the conflict and other members of the Hundred Heroes must step in to rescue her or restore order after some rash action goes awry. In the second kind, Siún saves the day, stepping up to cut straight to the heart of the crisis and end the threat when the other Heroes were too cautious or circumspect to do so. Siún's most famous deed happened in a town (usually one local to the storyteller) that fell under siege from Caorthainigh Gwyllt. All hope seemed lost as their defences burned and the Gwyllt soldiers massed outside, ready to enter the town and begin the slaughter. No longer willing to sit and wait for the enemy, Siún is said to have lept not only over the town's burning walls but over fifteen ranks of Gwyllt beyond to land face to face with the Caorthainigh Queen and strike her down.

Siún is traditionally identified as a Field Wildling but some mutter that her feats were far too bold for a “taming”.

Alarig Gorm, also known as Alarig the Relentless (Alarig Gur-um)

The stories say that following a terrible storm, Alarig Gorm was found washed up on the Northern shore of Siabhal by seaweed gatherers who brought him before Finian the Brave. When Alarig heard of the Hundred Heroes' ongoing campaign to preserve Siabhal from the Gwyllt, he pledged to join them in their battles. Alarig is said to have had tusks which grew to terrifying size when he exerted himself in battle and which were strong enough to turn away an axe-blow. Famed for his extraordinary resilience, many of his legends revolve around him beating overwhelming odds through feats of endurance. In his most famous tale, Alarig was amongst a group of warriors who were ambushed by the Gwyllt. Following the initial attack the creatures left Alarig for dead and carried off the others for some foul, unknown purpose. Upon awakening, Alarig pursued the Gwyllt for six days and six nights without rest, food, or drink. When he finally ran down his quarry, he freed the prisoners and led them in destroying their Gwyllt captures.

Alarig Gorm is usually identified as an early Krieger arrival in Tirneach though a few voices insist he must have been a Wilding.

The Counsellors

Although the Hundred Heroes were united in fighting against the Gwyllt, they didn't always agree in the best way to rid themselves of their vile influence. Those Hundred Heroes known as the Counsellors sometimes stood in opposition to the others, particularly Finian the Brave, and were known for their wisdom. Today, their descendants are as prestigious as other Ruby Families, and many of them have a reputation for straight talk and wise counsel. Sometimes it's even earned.

Aran “The Knight of the Loaves”

The tales of Aran “The Knight of the Loaves” generally fall into two categories, those intended for children and those intended for adults. The tales aimed at children involve frequent and on the nose puns to keep their interest, about a local hero rising to the occasion and using his loaf to save the day, and joining the upper crust of society. The tales intended for adults are normally more grounded, and mostly start with Aran already being a member of the Hundred Heroes, and during the course of the tale reveal he was once merely a wealthy and

respected baker from the village or town their adventure is taking place, and saves the day with either some obscure piece of local knowledge or an old relationship with a member of the community that provides them with crucial aid or information.

The stories always feature a different village as his hometown, making Leasiar the most common species for Aran to be portrayed as.

Submitted by Emmet.

Luachra the Long Armed (*lou-crah*)

Luachra is said to have been a wanderer, known across much of Siabhal during Finian's time, where she was known for involving herself in other's business uninvited. She often appeared to accompany Finian in times of need, wielding a long spear with unsurpassed skill, dancing beyond the reach of their foes despite her shorter stature. In some cases, Finian or another of the heroes had to come to her aid, after finding herself in a greater danger than she could face alone. A sometimes-divisive figure, Luachra is said to have been brash and outspoken – some say to the point of being unmannerly – while others focus on Luachra's open-hearted and compassionate nature. She often appears in stories to chastise other heroes for letting their ambition or greed get the better of them, or to counsel them in times of grief or despair. She is said to have met her end fighting to protect a stricken comrade, though which Hero she was protecting, and the reason why, are often left to the storyteller's imagination.

Luachra is usually identified as a Forest Wildling, though a few depictions claim she was a Human made fierce and resolute by life in the wild.

Submitted by Eimhin

Fiona, Who Slew the Red Prince

Fiona first appears in the tales of the Hundred Heroes as an enemy of Finian and his followers. She is said to have considered him simply another would-be warlord, with no loyalty to Siabhal but simply out for his own petty gains. The *filí* argue over the details of the story but it is agreed that it was some desperate act of self-sacrifice by Finian that finally won her to his cause and that Finian would not have survived the ordeal without her intervention. Even after joining the cause Fiona is often cast in the role of an accuser in the stories of other heroes, calling out their misdeeds and exhorting them to live up to their duty to Siabhal. Fiona's most acclaimed deed comes in the tales of the Red Prince, which recount the tragedy of Finian's son, returned from the grave as a terrible undead abomination. When Finian was unable to bring himself to destroy the thing that was once his son, Fiona took on the burden and slew the creature in single combat.

Fiona is traditionally identified as a Leasiar.

The Masters of the Arcane

With all the force of arms possessed by the Hundred Heroes, it also took great skill at magic to keep the Gwyllt from tearing the throat from the people of Siabhal for so many centuries. These Hundred Heroes were known to possess great power, and the Siabhlaigh would claim they even surpassed the Saoí of Draíod in their depth of knowledge. Many of the greatest practitioners of magic today in Siabhal can trace their ancestry back to one of the Heroes, though sometimes that power comes with a strange legacy.

Bróna Derarca Diavall of the Last Sight (*bro-nah deh-rar-ca dee-vall*)

A Leasiar who appears in stories often in a minor role, emphasising her intelligence, sense of justice, and legendary compassion of both living and dead. Often she appears at the very end of a story, eulogising another companion of Finian the Brave who fell in battle, summarising their legacy and lighting the funeral pyre herself. There is a small subsection of tales where the Gwyllt storm her ancestral home, Tor Brónach, laying low every other companion of Finian the Brave in a lengthy battle. But on the final night Bróna called for the heroes, both those lying on the field of battle and those resting in urns as ash, to rise once more not as undead, but fully revived and at the peak of their power, to slay ten hundred or ten thousand or a hundred thousand Gwyllt with moonlit glowing blades. The fate of those risen varies, but in all tales all that remained of Bróna was the echo of her voice, she and her great book of spells had vanished in the melee never to be seen again but always to be heard, a keening voice celebrating every hero's life when the winds around Tor Brónach pick up.

Submitted by Feargal

Cathbad, the Resplendent Thunder (*caw-huv*)

A proud and graceful warrior, Cathbad was a wizard of great renown. Not content with a life of quiet learning and contemplation he walked the path of battle magic. His spells wreaked havoc on many a Gwyllt host and his skills were sought the length and breadth of Siabhal. In short order he became known as one of the finest wizards the realm had seen and Cathbad is described as famously prideful to the point of arrogance. Stories involving Cathbad tend to feature him prominently but they are not always kind; in many stories it is Cathbad who single-handedly turns the tide of a battle or outwits a cunning Gwyllt, but in just as many it is his arrogance that causes terrible danger to fall on him and his fellows in the first place. No matter the cause

Cathbad succeeds in all of his adventures, including his famous death tale where he is forced to become the storm itself to break apart an army of Gwyllt and save the kingdom. He is destroyed by the effort.

Cathbad is nearly universally identified as a Drakeblooded, though some storytellers portray them as a Human or Vartach who stole thunder from the dragons.

Meirliún Gall, also known as Meirliún the Marked (*mare-loon*)

Meirliún is described as having entered Finian's service as payment for a great debt. Her stories focus on her secret knowledge and powerful skill with the arcane. Meirliún is said to have turned away packs of Gwyllt with a word and to have granted Finian insight into the nature of the enemy that turned the tide of battles. Meirliún is commonly credited with uncovering and defeating hidden or secret enemies such as Gwyllt impostors or creatures who lurked unseen and spread subtle corruptions. Meirliún's most famous story involves an extended duel with a powerful Gwyllt that pursued her from her homeland. In the tale, Meirliún must discern and satisfy conditions of time, place, and preparedness before she can harm the creature. There are tales that paint Meirliún's uncanny knowledge of the Gwyllt in a sinister light and repeating them is sure to earn the ire of those who claim her as their ancestor.

Meirliún is traditionally identified as a Vartach. In earlier stories her brand is described rather than named, in vague enough terms to be identified as Sunspear, Clashing Sword, Broken Chain and rarely a Linebreaker, depending on what best suits the themes of the story.

The Tiarnaí and High Families

Na Tiarnaí

The rulers of the Five Realms, collectively known as the Tiarnaí (*teer-nee*), form three ranks: Rider, Iarla (*eer-lah*), and Réig (*rayg*). The children of the Tiarnaí are eligible to serve as Galloglaigh by birthright.

Riders

The lowest rank is the Rider, who rules directly over the common folk. A Rider has been granted their land by the Iarla of the Realm (or the Réig in the case of Uasa) in recognition of a great service, almost always while serving as a gallóglach themselves. The size of the land granted is commensurate with the scale of the service and varies widely, though the minimum is as far as a person can see when mounted on horseback. In the case of an especially great service, for example saving the life of the Iarla in battle, the grant might be made for more than one generation. This is the only official way of keeping land within a Rider's family as an inheritance, however for influential Riders their offspring or foster children will find ample opportunity to distinguish themselves and be granted their parent's land for their lifetime.

All Riders are considered equal, which enables the constant squabbling and skirmishing over borders between them, but naturally those who have done the greatest deeds and who possess the most land have the most power within the Realm and sway with the Iarla, but even they are limited to what they can hold by strength of arms against the Gwyllt and their rivals/neighbours. Within Draíod there is another wrinkle to the principle of equal status between Riders; the Council of the Saoi ruled Draíod before the Réig united the Realms, and many say they still rule. The council is composed of the foremost scholars and tactical geniuses of the Learned Realm, and they advise (not to say direct) the Iarla in their rule of Draíod. Each and every Saoi is also a Rider, and while there are Riders who are not Saoi, their holdings are always above ground and therefore deemed far less important. This situation causes ongoing consternation from without Draíod, but the Draíodaigh provide much expertise in the Shaper's arts so it has so far been tolerated.

Riders are strictly limited in the size of the militia they can employ and officially may only deploy them defensively. Most Riders with smaller holdings must hire the gallóglach to deal with larger threats or to make their ambitions a reality. A Rider is expected to manage their own income, whether by maintaining their own lands or extracting tithes or rent from the people who live there.

Every five years a Reckoning takes place in the Realms, with the Réig's clerks circulating to a different Realm each year. The Reckoning is both census and ordnance survey, taking a record of who rules where and how many people they rule over. The official borders are thus redrawn every five years, and the strength of the Rider's claims reaches its zenith at this time. The months preceding a Reckoning are called "the golden time" by the gallóglaiigh bands, on account of the extra work they can count on as Riders set their sights on nearby lands.

larlas

Above the Riders, and nominally keeping them in line, is the larla. An larla rules over each Realm except Uasa, and within their Realm their word is second only to the Réig's. The Riders are bound to them by an oath of fealty, renewed every five years at the Reckoning. Each larla has their seat in and around the capital settlement of their Realm, but they may keep lands elsewhere, as is the case with Siabhal. The larlas are charged with keeping the peace in their Realm, which some choose to see as keeping it from the brink of civil war while others prefer to employ guards to patrol the Réig's Road and keep the gallóglaiigh bands on their books from one end of the year to the other.

Just like the Riders, the larlas must renew their fealty to the Réig every five years, at the Reckoning of Uasa. The oaths they swear are not widely known, but legend says they are like those sworn by the gallóglaiigh, but all the more potent, filling both the larlas and the Réig with torrents of power from the Shaper Themselves. These oaths have not stopped attempts (some successful) at seizing the throne over the centuries, but the terrible price that breaking the oaths extracts from traitors has made sure that they have not lived long after their attempt.

The High Families

Tirneach is an ancient place, and before the advent of the Réig there were other societies with rulers who traced their lineages back to even more far flung times. Although they have no official standing as rulers in the Five Realms of today, their descendants remain powerful and influential. Often they are among the wealthiest families in their realm and can be expected to have the ear of their Rider or larla.

These High Families, or more formally: Na Ard-Teaghlaigh (ard chai-lig), often play important roles in the running of their realms. Local coordination of tax collection, road maintenance, irrigation, and many other tasks are assigned to these prestigious families, providing them with the power and responsibility appropriate to their station. This provides an arena of competition away from the battlefield for the High Families, as a family that is seen as failing to adequately fulfil their duties might see their responsibilities poached by ambitious peers. Additionally, all members of the High Families are eligible to serve as Galloglaigh by birthright

Another thing that sets the High Families apart from the common folk of Tirneach is their practice of inheritance by Tanistry. Shortly after a new Head of the Family takes up the role, the family meets to appoint their Tanist; who will serve as their second and is expected to take up the role of Head of the Family upon their death. The eligible candidates and the eligible electors are any among the family whose parent or grandparent was a Family Head. This leads to broad and contentious competitions which do not always succeed in remaining civil. However, the practice has ensured that the High Families have never been short on heirs to take up their name and that those heirs must prove their worth before they can lead the family. The chieftains of Uasa are unique among the High Families in scorning this practice.

The Ruby Families of Siabhal

The most illustrious of the High Families are the Ruby Families of the Realm of Siabhal, named for the Ruby Court in the great city of Iomra. The Ruby Families claim descent from heroes of legend that fought against the Gwyllt at a time when the Gwyllt's hold on Tirneach was all the more fearsome.

The legends of Siabhal, preeminent among them the Legend of Lobhan, serve as a way of cataloguing the Hundred Heroes of Siabhal and the status of those descended from them. High Families from Siabhal generally style themselves according to their most famous ancestor. For example: "Cillian Ua Fhiona" or "Siún Ní Shiún", referring to Fiona Who Slew the Red Prince and Siún Who Leapt the Flaming Wall respectively.

Most of the Ruby Families count at least one Rider among their number, but some keep lands without one, which speaks to the status the Ruby Families have maintained in their Realm. The Iarla of Siabhal has always been a descendant of the royalty of the Kingdom of Siabhal, themselves descended from the greatest of the Hundred Heroes, the iconic Finian the Brave.

The Chieftains of Uasa

The chieftains of the tribes of Uasa descend from the shamans who brokered the original deals with the water spirits of the swamps and waterways of Uasa which protected the tribes from the Gwyllt in the terrible days

before the Réig came and set Tirneach free. While the tribes of Uasa no longer hold much political power, their leaders are still afforded great respect and all Uasaigh families know which tribe they owe loyalty to by tradition. The water spirits are primaeval forces left over from the Shaper's act of Creation, and the bargains that were struck have left their mark through the ages in ineffable ways.

The High Families of the tribes practice a peculiar inheritance ritual wherein the children of the current Family Head must retrieve hidden objects from under water. The precise details vary from family to family and the objects they retrieve determine who shall inherit.

The Courtly Clanns of Baol

In the highlands of Baol, some clanns claim preeminence amongst the others based on descent from individuals who served as advisors, scholars, and generals in the Court of the Amber King and Queen. The other clanns each fall into the orbit of one of the Courtly Clanns, though the patterns of alliance and loyalty shift and change over time. The power and influence of these Clanns has declined as the wealth and power of the Guilds has grown in the lowlands. However, the Courtly Clanns stay firm in their traditional lands and traditional ways, faithfully awaiting the foretold return of the Amber Hall.

The Drakeblooded Houses

Every Drakeblooded can trace their lineage back to the dragons of old, and the Drakeblooded Houses keep careful family trees and hold tight to their traditional duties. Virtually every Drakeblooded is a member of one of the ancient houses, though there are a few individuals who are unfortunate enough to be unclaimed at birth or exiled later in life. Exiles are encouraged to allow their children to be adopted by members of their ancestral house in good standing and it is unusual for them to refuse. The Houses take their reputations very seriously and any scion of the house who is spending more reputation than they're contributing won't be left uncorrected for long.

The Calendar in Tirneach

The land of Tirneach follows a four hundred-day calendar, with four seasons divided equally into one hundred days. While there are other calendars in other lands which use different divisions, some based on the phases of the moon, others on mysterious omens and signs, most of them also add up to a four hundred day cycle. This can be attributed to astronomers in ancient times noting the position of the sun in the sky at different times of the year, and of course farmers needing to know when to plant their crops.

The notation used in Tirneach for a date is, for example, “the 44th day of Spring, 800”, with the years marked from when the Réig first arrived in Tirneach. While it is noted that the moon goes through its own cycle, and these cycles are referred to as months, they have not been used to reckon the calendar in Tirneach for several centuries. Colloquially they are often used, as a handy term for a period of around 28 days, and cinnirí note the passing of the phases of the moon, however officially the 100 day seasonal calendar is used instead. Cycles of 10 days are referred to as “weeks”. Each season is punctuated with a major festival taking place across the 50th and 51st day. Before this festival is referred to as the early season, and afterwards the late. There are other smaller celebrations that take place in different Realms, but the major festivals are celebrated by all.

In Tirneach as in most places in the world, different times of year are marked by the change in activity of the Gwyllt. Certain times are safer than others.

While there is an expectation that certain times of the year will have reliable weather, Tirneach’s temperate climate means that there are regularly unseasonable spells. One day may pass without comment, but if the unseasonable weather continues for longer than a week it is called a Luaineach (*loon-uck*) or Fifth Season.

Spring

Spring in Tirneach is a time of renewal and rebirth. Rumours often abound that more Weeping go through Atosú in springtime, however this has never been proven and plenty of Weeping will point out that unless more people are killed in spring then it’s unlikely to have any truth to it. It is true that spring is when many Leasiar decide to walk on the Path of Many Candles, taking the advent of spring as a sign that they should start anew.

All across the Five Realms in spring, farmers are sowing their crops, and carefully preparing for the summer season when most growth will be done. During this season, sheep and cattle give birth to their young and the air is full of the sounds of young animals.

The major festival of spring is the Teallach (*chall-uck*) or Hearth Festival. It is a celebration of the pleasures of hearth and home, and families and neighbours will congregate for a large meal of the remaining stores left in from winter-time. Households will often hold a ceremonial exchange of calves, piglets, lambs or other young creatures in a mock form of fostering or hostage-taking, to symbolise the bond between neighbours and relatives, and often the offspring of these hostages are returned to their original family in subsequent years. Teallach often has a poignant edge to it, and the happiness of the young is especially celebrated during this time, as their elders know that summer is coming, and with it the zenith of Gwyllt activity during the year. During spring, gallóglaigh are most often involved in quarrels and bloodshed among the high families and Tiarnaí of the Five Realms, who take this opportunity to settle scores that have built up during the long year.

Summer

Summer in the Five Realms is a time of growth and the flourishing of nature, but also a time of turmoil when the attacks of the Gwyllt grow most frequent, coming to a crescendo during the Longest Days, when most mortals must pray to the Shaper for survival. Those Krieger who glory in battle and conflict look forward to summer in Tirneach all year, and in fact many make the long voyage from Schlachtfeld to Bruid just to take part in what they call the Worfeln (*vor-fen*), the intense rolling skirmishes against the Gwyllt as they boil up from the Great Forest. The Thing of Zahnhafen holds a seat for the most renowned warrior who comes out the other end of the summer season, also called Die Helleklinge (*dee hella klinga*). Those Firetouched whose families hark back to Orohogar celebrate the Festival of Flame or Fiesta de la Llama (*fee-esta de la yahma*) during late summer, although many of them wish for the blazing heat of their homeland rather than the unreliable weather of Tirneach. During this festival they pay respect to the Shaper (among other spirits that they venerate) and hold great markets which bring wares from all over the Five Realms and beyond.

While those who are tied to the land must stay to defend it, and hope that their crops and livestock will survive the predations of the Gwyllt in large enough measure to help them make it through the rest of the year, those who travel or have no fixed home will often congregate in the larger towns and villages, leading to a large swell in their population. This can present an even more tempting target for the Gwyllt, unfortunately,

and the leaders of many towns struggle to keep them at bay. More than one ruined and abandoned settlement can be traced back to a bad pair of Longest Days. It is a busy time for the bands of gallóglaiigh as well, who always have gainful but hard-going employment during the days of summer.

The Longest Days or Droch-cuingir (*druck kwing-ger*) are more an observance than a festival, with many dreading their approach all year. A common device in poems and ballads is that the Longest Days are like a pair of horses, drawing closer during the year with thundering hooves, until they trample all over you and then are blessedly fading in the distance. Nevertheless it is a time when families and neighbours come together, out of necessity and protection more than companionship granted, but for congregations with children there is still some effort to make the occasion as light-hearted as it can be. Long-lasting meals are prepared, and the expression “the last broth of summer” is used to refer to an onerous task or commitment that is now completed and won’t have to be fulfilled again for a long time.

Autumn

Autumn is a time when the Five Realms take stock and see what remains after the many dangers of the summer season. The Creidhe find themselves in high demand for repair work, and as many of them congregate in towns and settlements all over they take the opportunity during autumn to hold showcases for journeyman crafters to display their masterworks and be judged for master status in their skill. The Trade Guilds of Baol attempt to muscle into these proceedings wherever they can, always anxious to place their own members in a pre-eminent position on crafting councils, however the independent crafters of other Realms do their best to diminish the Trade Guilds’ involvement...while acknowledging that they possess some expertise. Human journeyman crafters often strive to outdo each other with the most outlandish masterworks, and while their track record at gaining acknowledged master status is spotty, many a gifted Human has garnered renown for a failed experiment which still represented a breakthrough in the crafting arts.

For Wildlings of both stripes, autumn is a time of veneration of nature. Field Wildlings take pride in the harvest that they have protected throughout the year, and acknowledge the blessing of the Shaper in sustaining Their flock. Forest Wildlings see autumn as a portentous time of decay, when the wild world prepares to sleep for the season of winter. They see it as a reminder that death is a natural part of life, and that they must live and strive as the Shaper exhorts them.

The major festival of autumn is the Cessation or Scor (*score*). Following the losses of summer, many across the Five Realms might find themselves succumbing to grief, which is a dangerous emotion that can cause the dead to return to plague the living. Cinnirí of the Order of Necromancers mobilise in great numbers during Scor, travelling everywhere across Tirneach. As they visit households and speak in town squares, they call on the Shaper's flock to celebrate the lives of those they have lost and not to lose themselves in mourning. Most of all the Necromancers encourage everyone listening to them to keep on living themselves, and to face the next challenge that life throws at them. The Cessation can at times be solemn or raucous, depending on how much a community has lost during summer-time, and on what the legacy of those who were lost was. It is also a time when those who have least can rely on their friends and neighbours to provide assistance, whether with repairs or supplies. For the gallóglagh, this is a time when the undead are widespread, and their scouts will be on the lookout for any massacre sites from summer...and for potential patrons who can pay to have the aftermath put down.

Winter

Winter in Tirneach often comes as something of a relief to the beleaguered people of the Five Realms. While the weather might turn worse than at other times of the year, it is rarely as bad as in farflung realms (where according to the tales the snow piles as deep as the trees). The Drakeblooded take particular joy in the storms that hit the coasts, often making pilgrimages to pay homage to their forebears: the great dragons. They say the spirits of the dragons still reside in those storms, even though their bodies have departed. For the Vartach and Fathach of Draíod, winter is a time of determination and creation. The Arcane Colleges of Draíod hold their final examinations at this time, allowing the Saoí to identify potential candidates to join their ranks or serve the Realm in some other capacity. Winter is also a time when the most new Fathach are brought to life, as scholars have observed over the centuries that the leylines are best attuned to creation at this time. The same scholars have theorised that the leylines of the caverns are somehow oppositely charged to life above, as above ground winter is a time when nature stands still, but these theories remain unproven.

The Longest Night or Tost (*tosst*) is the name given to the two days in the middle of winter when the hours of darkness are longest, and it is a time of great celebration everywhere. During the Longest Night, the power of the Shaper is at its pinnacle, and the Gwyllt are kept completely at bay. In all the long history of the Five Realms, there has never been an attack by the Gwyllt during the Longest Night. Even in Bruid, the Great Forest is devoid of fear...although of course one must still be wary of wild beasts and other perils! The

Longest Night is marked by parties and other festivities throughout the Five Realms, and it is important to acknowledge that all lives are precious in the eye of the Shaper. High families often go out of their way to rub shoulders with the commons; the Réigs of history have famously gone in disguise to visit their people and given boons to those they find worthy; all rank and title is forgotten. At least, that's what the grand tradition of the Longest Night is, whether it is upheld depends very much on the attitudes of those in power at the time.

For gallóglagh, the Longest Night is a welcome rest, and many bands disperse to visit their homelands and families. There are some especially vigilant bands that strictly keep to their duty during the festival, often those bands whose thanes hail from Bruid or listen to the counsel of the Torchbearers. They are not alone in wondering if one Longest Night the Gwyllt will break through the protection of the Shaper and wipe the Five Realms from the map entirely.

Other festivals

The faithful of the Shaper mark the first full moon of Winter as a time for veneration, looking forward to the arrival of the Longest Night and giving thanks for the protection bestowed by the great god. Cinnirí of the Order of the Teachers often organise shows of skills, and encourage the wealthy to make donations to the poor, as a way of showing that all are grateful for the gifts they have received.

A minor festival celebrated in Siabhal alone is Finian's Day, or Lá Fhéile Fhinian (*law fay-leh*), which takes place on the last day of Spring. As Spring moves into Summer and the Gwyllt become more fearsome even in the relatively quiet lands of Siabhal, children are taught a different story of the Hundred Heroes each day of Spring, culminating with Finian the Brave and his defence of Siabhal against the Gwyllt.

Bridging Day or Muircuing (*mer-cu-ing*) is the celebration of the Réig's arrival into Tirneach centuries ago. It is most widely celebrated in Uasa in the second-last week of Winter, but other Realms take this time to pay homage as well.

In the highlands of Baol, the first week of Summer is marked as the Ómós Ómra (*oh-moh-ss oh-m-ra*) or the Days of Amber, when the Courtly Clanns tell tales of the Amber Hall and the great protection and honour once granted to them by the King and Queen. The lowlanders of Baol celebrate this time too, but mostly because the highlanders are too engaged in their revels to mount any raids upon their neighbours.

Law and Order in Tirneach

There are only two crimes which all authorities in Tirneach are bound to prevent, pursue, and punish: the raising of undead abominations and treating with the Gwyllt enemy.

All other issues are seen not as matters for the Tiarnaí, the Church, or even the militias and Galloglaigh to concern themselves with, but as disputes between families or individuals. To resolve these disputes and prevent disagreements from flourishing into feuds, the people of Tirneach rely on a tradition of arbitration by judges.

Judges

Being a judge is not a permanent or formal role, though there are individuals who have developed a skill and reputation for it, but rather a position that is filled as needed. The judge who is to hear any particular dispute is chosen by the parties of that case, though often they cannot agree on who should judge the matter and it falls to their Rider to make the choice (or the Iarla, if Riders are involved). If there is no local figure with a strong reputation as a judge, or if they're not seen as impartial in the case at hand, travelling Peacesworn are usually the preferred choice. Typically either one or three judges are appointed, depending on the severity of the case, and both sides must swear to be bound by the decision of the judges. Judges are officially paid by the local Rider, although they may often be given gifts by those who are grateful for the outcome of their judgement. Riders are incentivised to keep the peace in their Riding, as more than one tale tells of an opportunistic (and probably apocryphal) judge descending on a previously happy Riding and having the denizens at each other's throats by sundown.

In the case of a crime such as murder, the victim's family may bring a claim against the alleged killer. If any individual refuses to cooperate or appear before a judge, the head of their household can be held responsible for their actions. Judgements usually result in a fine being paid by the offending party to the individual they have wronged, although punishment rituals and more novel sanctions are also common. If a fine cannot be paid, property of equal value may be seized in its place.

There are many, particularly among the Teachers, who take a scholarly interest in the practice of judgement, and writings offering guidance and opinion on good judicial practice, as well as collections of rulings and commentary, circulate throughout the Realms.

“I was held up in Daracoi for two days to hear out a claim of theft against the smith of the town. It was, in my view, entirely spurious. I ruled that the amount claimed to have been stolen was due to the smith as recompense for the slander against her.” – Laeg, Peacesworn Merchant

There are no prisons in Tirneach but most large settlements will maintain a small jail where the disorderly or anti-social can be corralled temporarily. Riders are permitted to maintain a militia suitable for the defence of their stronghold and it is traditionally tolerated for this militia to be deployed for the general purposes of keeping the peace in the Riding. It is rare for this type of action to result in the involvement of a judge.

Loyalty and Treason

All people of Tirneach are presumed to owe loyalty to their family, their Rider, their Iarla, the Réig, and the Shaper. It is upon this duty of loyalty, rather than a code of law which the authority of the Réig rests and by which they are empowered to issue edicts to their people. In many situations however, this natural loyalty is supplemented with oaths that specify additional rights and responsibilities. It is through oaths that the Iarlas, and Riders derive their authority, and the Gallóglagh their strength. Treason, dereliction of loyalty and the breaking of oaths, are grave matters in Tirneach and would be seen as more than enough reason to bring a claim against the offending party. In most cases however the matter is resolved personally, and permanently.

Officers of the Band

Thane

The Thane is the leader of the band and accepts orders directly from the Réig. They may also opt to accept missions offered by a Rider or Iarla.

Thane's Lieutenant

The Thane's Lieutenant is penultimately responsible for leadership, decision making, and the general operation of the band. All other officers report to them and they report directly to the Thane.

Deputy Lieutenant

The Deputy Lieutenant is the Lieutenant's second-in-command, tasked with assisting and supporting the Lieutenant. The Deputy Lieutenant is also expected to act as advocate for the members of the band to the Lieutenant in cases of concern, conflict, or low morale. In the event that the Lieutenant is absent or otherwise unable to fulfil their duties, the Deputy becomes responsible for the duties of the Lieutenant.

Watch Officer

The Watch Officer is responsible for establishing and overseeing procedures to ensure the safety and security of the band's encampments. In the event that the Deputy is unable to fulfil their duties, the Watch Officer becomes responsible for the duties of the Deputy. A high degree of cooperation is expected between the Watch Officer and Master of the Camp.

Quartermaster

The Quartermaster is responsible for the acquisition, use, and upkeep of the band's common possessions, as well as for recording contracts and for the receipt and distribution of funds. The Quartermaster is also ultimately responsible for the payment of tithes and taxes. In the event that the Master of the Camp is unable to fulfill their duties, the Quartermaster becomes responsible for the duties of the Master of the Camp.

Master of the Camp

The Master of the Camp is responsible for monitoring and maintaining the morale of the band. They are also responsible for establishing and overseeing procedures to ensure that guests of the band are kept safe and treated in a hospitable manner. A high degree of cooperation is expected between the Watch Officer and Master of the Camp.

Cinnire at Arms

The Cinnire-at-Arms is chosen from among the band's cinnirí and is expected to act as an expert and advisor on religious matters as well as spokesperson for the other cinnirí of the band. They are also responsible for setting out and overseeing procedures for dealing with disciplinary issues within the band. Further, they are expected to ensure the band acts within the spirit of the Shaper's teachings and to guard against heresy and the influence of the gwyllt.

Wizard at Arms

The Wizard-at-Arms is the band's expert and advisor on the workings of magic and the arcane.

Reconnaissance Officer

The Reconnaissance Officer is responsible for the gathering and distribution of intelligence. They are traditionally afforded a high degree of latitude in pursuit of their duties.

The Deputy Lieutenant, Watch Officer and Quartermaster can inherit command, in that order. If the Quartermaster is unable to fulfil their duties, the most Vigourous surviving Galloglaigh becomes responsible

Historic Battles

The Battle of Traitor's Tears

Probably the most seismic battle in Tirneach's recent history took place in Baol. It was the culmination of a plot that had gone on from the reign of the previous Réig and erupted in the early years of Maeláine Uí Chonchobhair's accession to the crown, in the year 792. What had been an internecine affair of skirmishes, assassinations and raids became full-scale warfare, with gallóglagh bands taking one side or the other, not for coin but for promises of wealth and power.

The larla of Baol, Gearóidín Nic Ardal (*ger-oh-deen*) had joined the other larkas in a sense of growing discontent during the reign of Airt Ua Chonchobhair (*art oo-a con-cu-var*). Her towns were under constant harassment by the highlander Clanns, the Réig's courtiers imposed higher and higher tariffs on trade through her Realm, and Kriegerish privateers flying the flag of Bruid were constantly harrying ships along her coast. Out of desperation she even challenged the Réig to a duel, using a technicality of her oaths that even the hoariest scholars had to scratch their heads about, but no answer was forthcoming. In the end she took the law into her own hands.

The Baolach trade guilds have always maintained armed guards for their caravans and chapter houses, but now the larla issued a charter demanding that each supply a standing militia for the use of the Realm, to restore order and peace during a period of emergency. Some were only too happy to oblige, and they were intrigued by the demand for secrecy. No word of this mobilisation was to leave Baol.

Of course it did, and rapidly. The Réig's courtiers were alarmed, but in the declining years of Airt's reign little could be done, with so many crises around the Five Realms shouldn't they be grateful one larla was taking control? The trade guild militias held back the Clanns for a raiding season and normalcy was restored. Réig Airt died in 790, and Réig Maeláine rose to the throne. Gearóidín Nic Ardal travelled to Corroch and spoke the oaths with the other larkas, and the problem seemed to have gone.

Still operating as an open secret, larla Gearóidín was expanding her trade guild militias and looking beyond her borders to the north and south. She was encouraged in this by the Happy Harvest Trade Guild, friends of her family for many decades, and the Guild with the largest and most widespread militias. The larla and the Happy

Harvest hatched a plan together: declare Baol to be a sovereign Realm, leave the other four Realms to their benighted Ua Chonchobhair dynasty, seize whatever territory they could in the ensuing chaos, and reap the rewards.

It was an ambitious plan, and one that very nearly worked. Iarla Gearóidín had fought as a gallóglach herself, and was widely known and respected. Her agents approached several thanes and whispered in their ears. Those thanes who refused to break their oaths were dealt with, leaving their bands in disarray. The bands that turned traitor swiftly mobilised and made their way to Baol, joining the trade guild militias in the Green Marches and Lakelands to stand against the rest of the Realms.

To the surprise of the whole of Tirneach, when the news came of Baol's rebellion, it was the Réig who stood up and took action. She rallied those bands that were still loyal, and rode to the borderlands with Baol herself at the head of a column of mounted Drakeblooded, loyal guards of House Roaring Thunder. She was met there by six bands of loyal gallóglach, and they faced the numerically superior traitor army on the high ground above Loch Cleamh (*lock clay-v*), with a steep drop to the north.

Many hundreds lost their lives in what was swiftly afterwards called the Battle of Traitor's Tears, as the skies opened and the rain tore the foothills into a muddy and treacherous marsh. Things looked grim for a time for the Réig's army, until two things turned the tide. First, a surprise assault came from a band led by the human highlander thane Gríosla Mac Niamha (*gree-sla mack neev-ah*), who scaled the cliffs by the side of Loch Cleamh and attacked the rebel army from behind, allowing the Réig's forces to regroup from the first assault. Second, the Réig herself called in a voice like thunder, using the power of the Shaper to overpower the storm itself, to condemn the traitors and proclaim they had broken their oaths.

The traitor gallóglach had already been fighting below their full strength, the First Oath broken as soon as they took the field against the Réig herself. Now they were completely undone, the power that the Five Oaths granted had abandoned them. They were now no match for the loyal gallóglach bands, who had already outclassed the trade guild militias and now rounded on their former comrades-in-arms. The Creidhe thane Tríona Nic Eibhlín (*tree-na nick ev-leen*) fought fiercest of all, standing alongside the Réig, and slayed the traitor thane of the Red Wolf band.

The loyal army won the day and forced the rebels to surrender. The traitor gallóglagh bands were disbanded, their oaths already broken. The Happy Harvest Trade Guild had their charter revoked and their assets sold to their rivals. Iarla Gearóidín Nic Ardal was stripped of her title and sent into exile, while in her place for the first time in living memory a highlander was sworn in as Iarla, one Dalles of Clann Niamha, the famous Drakeblooded warrior. The thanes of the loyal gallóglagh bands were richly rewarded with Ridings and political power, and Réig Maeláine Uí Chonchobhair had struck the first blow in dispelling the legacy of her uncle.

The Siege of Lobhan

Every Siabhlach with noble blood claims descent from one of the Hundred Heroes. The central legend of Siabhal is the Legend of Lobhan. Lobhan was, until recently, a mid-sized town in northern Siabhal. The Legend speaks of Finian the Brave, the Hundred Heroes and their great victory over the Gwyllt which made Siabhal a comparative haven for mortal people in the centuries before the arrival of the first Réig. Lobhan no longer exists.

In the declining years of Réig Airt Ua Chonchobhair's reign, starting in the late Autumn of 787, the leading family of Lobhan, named House Mac Éanans, proclaimed that they were some of the most prominent Hundred Heroes reborn. They produced the famed relics of the Heroes, many of which had been thought lost. They spoke and acted as if they were the Heroes of the Legend and even reproduced some of their great feats, for example the daughter of House Mac Éanan who claimed to be Siún Who Leapt the Flaming Wall was able to vault over houses and the town walls.

Claiming to be figures from legend and magical feats are one thing, but the Mac Éanans and their followers did not stop at that. Soon they began to speak of restoring the glory of Siabhal, with them as the natural leaders of the restored Kingdom of Siabhal of course. Even in the wayward years of Réig Airt's rule this treachery could not stand.

The gallóglagh bands were mustered and marched on Lobhan. When they arrived, the gallóglagh found the town gates sealed, and the populace madly in support of the Hundred Heroes Reborn, as they were called. More and more of the Mac Éanans and their associated relatives took on the roles of the Heroes, until the whole band out of the Legend were represented.

It was weeks before the siege formally began. Gallóglaiigh thanes first called on the town to surrender, but whenever they would negotiate with the town's leadership, they would first become sympathetic and inevitably would enter the town and not return. A month had passed before the danger was recognised for what it was and the order went out that only written communication was allowed to pass between the gallóglaiigh bands and the besieged. Even then every night the gallóglaiigh camp would find that more of their number had deserted.

Details of what happened inside Lobhan are sketchy, but from survivors' accounts it seems the Hundred Heroes Reborn were dedicated to recreating their famous battle out of legend, with the gallóglaiigh bands outside cast in the role of the Gwyllt. A few skirmishes took place, with horrible casualties on both sides, but the ranks of the besieged were soon replenished. Despite the best efforts of the besiegers, countryfolk were still deserting their farms and gallóglaiigh abandoning their posts, daring to enter the town of Lobhan and act out the strange play within.

As 787 lumbered into 788, morale was low among the gallóglaiigh bands. The Thanes had even begun to discuss whether some accommodation could be reached with the Mac Éanans and their fanatic followers. Things changed when the Golden Knives arrived at Lobhan. Led by the Réig's niece Maeláine Uí Chonchobhair, this band had won great fame in fighting in the deepest tunnels of Draíod against the strangest and most fearsome of foes. It was said that every gallóglach in the band had walked the Way of Wisdom, fighting every step of the way.

Maeláine called a council of the thanes, claiming that her uncle the blessed Réig had dispatched her band specially to end the siege and bring peace to northern Siabhal. The other thanes scoffed privately at this, as it was common knowledge that Réig Airt was suspicious of his niece and her ambitions, and had refused to grant her an audience for many years. They began to listen however as Maeláine outlined her plan: sending gallóglaiigh into Lobhan to take it from within.

Surely this was madness, as everyone who entered the town fell under the spell and began to act out the Legend of Lobhan? To counter their protests, Maeláine introduced Solatas, her cinnire-at-arms and a famed ritualist. Solatas told the assembly that he had studied the reports of the siege and had created a ritual that would shield a small group from the influence that had struck all within the town. With this protection and

other boons bestowed by the Shaper, the gallóglaiigh would be able to steal within Lobhan, open the gates, and put an end to the whole affair.

Although they were dubious, the thanes agreed to this plan when Maeláine said it would be her own Golden Knives that would make the attempt. Solatas led the rituals along with the cinnirí-at-arms of the other bands, bestowing the blessings of the Shaper upon the ten gallóglaiigh who had volunteered to break the siege. When the ritual was ended, they ventured forth into the night.

Hours passed, and nothing was heard from the town. No attacks harried the gallóglaiigh lines, but the gates did not open. The bands had begun to murmur amongst themselves that the attempt had failed, when a terrible cry rose up from the town, as if thousands of people were suffering a fate worse than death and had full knowledge of it before it befell them. Afterwards there was dead silence, and not even the birds sang as dawn began to break.

Finally, a lone figure appeared atop the walls of the town, and clambered down to the outside. Her livery was torn and she was battered and bloodied, but a cry soon went up from the Golden Knives as they recognised Maoithneasa the gallóglach. She began to walk back to the besieging bands' lines, but fell to her knees before she could make it all the way. Maeláine was among the first to reach her, and many heard what Maoithneasa said to her: "Burn it to the ground. Leave nothing standing."

Straight away, Maeláine directed her gallóglaiigh to begin the preparations for the burning of Lobhan. The other thanes challenged her, and demanded a council, and Maoithneasa was brought before them. Only those who were at that council know what she said, but within an hour the orders had gone out that all assembled bands were to find anything that would burn in the nearby countryside and bring it to the town walls.

As the fire was set and it began to spread within the town walls, the gallóglaiigh did not hear the cries of fear they had been dreading, nor did the smell of burned flesh reach their noses. It was as if every living thing in the town had already disappeared. Rumours flew about what Maoithneasa had seen, and what the terrible cry had been, but Maoithneasa and the thanes refused to speak of it.

When the great fire had died down, the walls were broken and the stones themselves hauled to the Endless Sea where they were tumbled off the Cliffs of Ísliú into the Endless Sea. Nothing remained of Lobhan except the Legend itself, and many of those gallóglaiigh who took part in the Siege of Lobhan, even those who were themselves Siabhlaigh, could no longer bear to hear it recited in their presence.

Trade and Commerce in the Five Realms

The Five Realms exist in delicate harmony with one another. While the larlas jockey for advantage and influence and are encouraged to do so by the Réig and the Réig's retinue, they also form alliances from time to time and trade is often the most crucial aspect of treaties and agreements.

The Economy of Siabhal

Siabhal is the wealthiest of the Realms, and is the breadbasket of Tirneach. The rolling fields of the Golden Valley are tended by farmers who are sworn to the Siabhlach High Families by the ancient code of bondage, which existed in the Kingdom of Siabhal in ages past and is still adhered to today. Courtiers in Corroch frown upon this practice, and the communal farmers of other Realms say that like other Siabhlach traditions it appears to hugely benefit the old families and place most of the burden on the peasant, but it cannot be denied that Siabhal's harvest are the most bountiful, and the farmers of Siabhal are justifiably proud of their efforts.

The Grey Lands that border on Uasa are named not just for the wild moors but also the pale flax fields that stretch between the two Realms. The cultivation of flax, and the dyeing of the resulting linen, is a busy industry in Siabhal where the latest fashions are on everyone's mind from the larla down to the lowliest peasant. To the northeast, the Cláí Mountains are known to produce gold and other precious substances, especially in the Riding of Bolscar, the ancestral homes of the line of Ua Chonchabhair Réigs. In the northwest, the gentle rolling Hills of Torthu are home to vineyards and wheatfields, and Siabhlach wine is prized throughout the Realms.

From Siabhal foodstuffs, textiles and precious metals spread throughout the Realms. The best trade routes follow the high road west, avoiding the Grey Lands that border on Uasa (and the Réig's tariffs on trade into Uasa) and winding around Loch Cleamh and down into the lowlands of Baol.

The Economy of Baol

All trade that passes through the lowlands of Baol is firmly in the grip of the trade guilds. Baolach statute dictates that all merchant caravans passing through the Realm must be under the auspice of one or other trade guild - firm evidence (as if it was needed) that the larlas of Baol are also firmly in the trade guild's grip -

and Baolach trade guilds generally have contracts with the Siabhlach noble families who wish to send goods through the Proud Realm. One benefit of this protectionist policy is that the merchant caravans are heavily guarded by the guild militias, because they are often targeted for raids. For larger caravans bands of gallóglaiigh are hired through the auspices of local Riders.

These raids come not just from regular bandits, beasts or Gwyllt, but from the highly organised and dedicated highlander caterans. Raiding the lowlands is a pastime and lucrative occupation for the highland Clanns, and the merchant caravans are a favourite target. The loot is carried back home where it sustains the Clann or gets sold off the western coast to the Krieger ships that sail the Sea of Fortunes. Those who pay the trade guilds to protect their caravans mutter that the several caravans per season that fall victim to the highlanders are in truth given as tribute as part of a relationship between the Clanns and the guilds that is far cosier than meets the eye.

When the highlanders are not raiding, they are herding their formidable cattle through the highland valleys, hunting the plentiful game, and searching for relics of the Amber Kingdom which they sell for a fraction of their true worth at the great markets (held under armistice) at Calldoon, Dunarragid and the other frontier towns between highland and lowland.

The trade guilds' wealth does not derive from profiteering alone. They also employ farmers to work the fertile lands in the Lakelands, or sponsor apprentices learning a trade who will be loyal to that trade guild for the rest of their career, selling their wares with them alone. The trade guilds claim that the competition between them keeps prices low and makes Baol prosperous, but outsiders wonder who truly rules Baol, the Iarla or the guilds?

The Economy of Draíod

Winding their way south into the Green Marches, the borderland between Baol, Bruid and Draíod, many of the merchant caravans turn west and enter the Learned Realm. Due to its unique geography, Draíod is starved of good farmland. Sheep are plentiful on the surface of Draíod, but the larger settlements below the ground are dependent on trade with other Realms to keep their people fed. Smaller, poorer settlements can subsist on the edible mosses, fungi and algae which they cultivate, but those of higher social standing turn their noses up at such fare. Draíod meets the exorbitant cost of importing most of its food through its own exports:

minerals and irons mined in the depths of the Realm, often by Fathach that have never seen the light of day. The Realm also does a lively trade in magical artefacts produced by mages of the Vartach and other species. Many of the most powerful enchanted items scattered throughout the Realms were originally acquired in such a manner...although their owners generally concoct a heroic tale to go with their treasure.

The Ring Mountains which surround Draíod are largely impassable, and the rumoured tunnels that link Draíod to every major settlement in the Five Realms are apocryphal, so apart from the Green Marches the other major route out of the Learned Realm is Vercontin's Pass. Trade through the Pass into Uasa is exempt from the Réig's tariffs, and so the shepherds of Draíod drive their flocks into the Crown Realm for sale each year, and their arrival marks the start of an annual festival.

The Economy of Uasa

Despite the extensive land reclamation which allowed the Réig's seat at Corroch to be built, Uasa remains a marshy and waterlogged Realm, criss-crossed by many rivers of varying degrees of navigability. The common folk make a living plying these waters for fish, and guiding barges through to Loch Achar and beyond. The Réig and their courtiers are sustained by the tithes which are claimed from the earnings of the gallóglaiigh bands. As the only standing armies allowed in the Five Realms, the gallóglaiigh are effectively a tax on the Tiarnaí of the Five Realms, who must employ the gallóglaiigh to face the various threats facing their Ridings and Realms, or else face the wrath of the Réig for exceeding the strict size limits on local militias.

Béalcaoch on the Blind Coast is the epicentre of trade in Uasa. It is the favoured port of merchant ships that come from the Eastern Reaches across the Shaper's Sea, and the Firetouched often bring ships from even farther afield. Of course Béalcaoch is also the home port of many smugglers who launder their ill-gotten goods through the port and up the Young River to the rest of the Realms. It is home to many artisans, a high proportion of whom hail from Baol originally and have escaped the clutches of the trade guilds. Trade from Uasa outwards benefits from the blessing of the Réig and does not incur their trade tariffs, hence its attraction to all merchants both legitimate and illicit.

The trade tariffs were the idea of the Order of Teachers, who have their headquarters in the Citadel of the Shaper at Corroch. The Order encourages its cinniri to take up a trade, and many make good livings as merchants. They see it as their duty to enrich Uasa as the favoured Realm of the Shaper, but they also advise

and instruct people throughout the Realms whether they seek to add to already incalculable riches or to scrape a living together, all to venerate the Shaper's great design. The Teachers are very commonly found in Bruid, where the Shaper's battle against the Gwyllt is encapsulated in the people's struggle to survive and to flourish in a land still heavily under the Gwyllt's influence.

The Economy of Bruid

The most southerly and isolated of the Realms is also the most dependent on others for trade. Mostly covered by the Great Forest, Bruid's great resource is timber. Woodcutting is a dangerous occupation in any Realm, but in Bruid the danger is doubled due to attacks both from wild beasts and the Gwyllt. Many peasants opt to seek a safer life herding sheep, which thrive on the good farmland which lies fallow due to the proximity of the Forest. The larks of Bruid offer large boons to settlers who will sow the land, but those brave few who take up the offer do not tend to last long.

The advent of the Krieger has changed Bruid in many ways, and especially in terms of fauna and flora. The Krieger planted many hundreds of acres with a tree not native to Tirneach which they call the lorbeer, from which the Riding of Lorbeer got its name. The leaves of this tree are ubiquitous in Krieger cuisine. They also brought their favourite game and fighting beasts with them, which rapidly escaped from their loose captivity and are now widespread throughout Bruid. They are one and all formidable, as befits the Krieger homeland, and have met their match in the wilds of Bruid. The hives of the Trotdolch, an enormous species of bee also called the dagger wasp, produce a honey that has no equal throughout the Five Realms. The Krieger know the secrets of collecting this bounty, and so Bruideach mead has earned a reputation for quality, and is sought after by all those who visit Zahnhafen.

The Krieger port on Bruid's western coast has maintained links with the Krieger homeland across the Sea of Fortunes, and their vessels bring many strange and exotic goods into Bruid which are traded throughout the Realms. Of course it is also the home port of the many Bruideach Krieger vessels which sail all around the Tirneach peninsula. How many of them may indulge in piracy is not a question that the Thing of Zahnhafen likes to be asked. Of course all Krieger in Bruid are loyal to the Five Realms and would not do such a thing. Those Krieger who come from abroad are of course outside of the Thing's jurisdiction.

The Role of the Gallóglai

Any sort of trade, commerce or agriculture in the Five Realms is dependent on the bands of gallóglai which roam throughout Tirneach. The Riders, Iarlas and Réig form a warrior aristocracy, but they are acutely aware of the effect that martial threats can have on trade within their holdings. Hiring and dispatching the gallóglai is a noble privilege, and the bands often find themselves involved in border disputes and lesser wars over bountiful territory, but they will also take work from the Riders and Iarlas which is of direct benefit to trade. Come harvest time in Siabhal, local Riders often hire them to protect their fields and flocks from the Gwyllt, wild beasts, brigands, and other threats. In Baol, when the highland raids provoke the lowlands too far, the Iarla will send the gallóglai bands on punitive expeditions into the Bolge or the Bight, to teach the Clanns a lesson. In Bruid, the protection provided by the gallóglai are essential for the day-to-day existence of shepherds and farmers who would otherwise be exterminated by the creatures of the Gwyllt. In Uasa the bands combat smuggling and ensure that the border with Siabhal is respected. In Draíod they patrol the caverns and tunnels, keeping them clear of many terrible and dire creatures. Without the gallóglai, commerce in the Five Realms would grind to a halt.

Currency in the Five Realms

Long ago in Tirneach there were many different coins accepted by merchants and hoarded by misers. The Kingdom of Siabhal of course had its own coinage, long flat sheets of gold emblazoned with the faces of kings and queens and the various sigils of the Ruby Court. These are still commonly found, and even still accepted in some parts of Siabhal, particularly the great city of Iomra. The king and queen of the Amber Hall in Baol are supposed to have given enchanted coins to their most favoured subjects which would be spent and then appear again in the owner's pocket the next day...although any putative examples found today do not share this magical property. In other parts of Tirneach, the most common coins in circulation were those brought over by canny traders from the east, who had convinced the folk of Tirneach that they had some worth. A commoner looking to go to market might use coins from as far away as the homeland of the Firetouched in their pocket. All this came to an end with the unification of the Five Realms.

Nowadays the sole currency of the Five Realms is the pingin. There are different denominations and weights of pingin, such as five-weights and ten-weights. They are minted in Uasa, where silver is the most abundant precious metal. The weight of a pingin is prescribed by the courtiers of Uasa, whose agents will often turn up

at markets and fairs throughout the Five Realms with their famous weighing scales, to ensure that the Réig's coinage is not being adulterated or faked.

Of course in the more rural and backwoods parts of Tirneach such as Bruid or the highlands of Baol, having a load of silver on hand is just not practical or safe. There, barter and credit are relied upon instead. In order to prevent the silver coins simply being melted down and used for other purposes, there are strict (many say draconian...though never in earshot of the Drakeblooded) laws against tampering with the pingin, and anyone who does so, whether they be an artificer making a magical artefact or a merchant shaving off a few scraps of silver, can expect to face terrible retribution.

Occupations in the Five Realms

While the magic of the Shaper makes some things easier, it cannot till the soil, milk the cows or bring in a catch of fish. The dearest wish that most commoners have is to have enough to feed their families, and perhaps a little extra to sell at the market. The Riders protect the people as best they can, and pay to bring in the gallóglach if the threats posed by bandits, beasts, undead or Gwyllt grow too fearsome. For this they receive tribute from the folk that live in their Riding, though the manner of this varies hugely. In Bruid the Riders often muck in alongside the people as well as personally fighting for the safety of folk who will generally be friends and followers who formed the Riding with them, and they are cared for in return. In Siabhal, ancient bonds and pacts bind the people to the land, and the land to the Riders; tribute is regular and formal, and escape from the station you were born to is difficult if not impossible.

Artisans are highly respected in Five Realms Society, and those who achieve mastery of their chosen profession are highly sought after. A Rider might offer a gifted blacksmith a hefty sum to come and live within their Riding. Those who dabble in alchemy and the arcane are most often found in the larger settlements where the obscure ingredients their craft requires and the comforts their craft can afford them are in good supply.

The Galloglaigh

A gallóglach may sponsor any person who they think has the proper qualities to join a band. This often happens because the person has come to the notice of the gallóglach in some way, by doing them a service or doing something noteworthy in the gallóglach's presence. An enterprising commoner who wishes to become a gallóglach can often do so by being in the right place at the right time.

There are many occupations in Tirneach which are known to result in opportunities for aspiring gallóglaiigh. Treasure hunting for ancient relics in the highlands of Baol or for the ruins of abandoned settlements in the Great Forest in Bruid is an extremely lucrative venture for those who can handle themselves, as they are likely to find all manner of things that gallóglaiigh are interested in. Exploring the caverns and tunnels of Draíod is not a job for the faint of heart, but the Saoi are always keen to find what the limits of their Realm truly are. Smuggling goods is a good way to come to the attention of less scrupulous gallóglaiigh, for better or worse, especially if you can prove yourself among the mist-runners of Uasa.

In Siabhal one of the most risky, varied and potentially rewarding occupations is that of tailor's factor. In the great fashion houses of Iomra, tailors constantly seek to outdo each other, seeking ever more elaborate materials and dyes so that they can craft the greatest garments and gain favour and fortune among the Siabhlach noble houses. Factors travel throughout the Five Realms and further to find weird and wonderful things to bring back to the Heart of the Realms, and some of their noble patrons are so focused on making a splash at the next feast that they will even engage the gallóglaiigh to help.

One of the more ubiquitous occupations, and one of the most likely to draw attention of the gallóglach bands, is that of pit fighter. Duelling as a matter of honour is an important tradition in the Five Realms, common in legend and in life. Mock duels as a display of skill are common at festivals and market days where the mock duellists will put on a presentation for what coins the crowd might throw. Pit fights go further than any mock duel. Fighters risk injury and even death in bloody brawls and savage sword-fights while the crowd bays for blood and lays money on the victor. The Church of the Shaper officially disapproves of fighting where no insult has been offered or feud declared, but the popularity of pit fights prevents the cinniri from doing anything except advising the local Tiarnaí that they should not condone pit fighting in their Ridings or Realms. The greatest of pit fighters can grow very wealthy, and those who impress the gallóglaiigh who watch their bouts may have their pick of bands to join.

Of course the crowning occupation for those who want an adventurous life is to join a band of gallóglaiigh and swear the Five Oaths. Camaraderie, courageous endeavours and cold hard coin are just some of the many attractions. For those who are lowly born, becoming a gallóglach is a sure way to increase social standing and support their family or become wealthy and comfortable themselves. For the High Families, service in a band is often the only way to confirm that they are worthy of their station in life, and not just fortunate in their

birth. Even for the most mercenary-minded of gallóglaiġh, the secret hope that your deeds will one day be the stuff of legend is a motivation to fight and to win.

The Season of Uncertainty

The Death of a Réig

The Réig is dead.

The news is full of rumour but from what you can gather, Réig Maeláine was on an official visit to the island of the Shaper's Steps with some of her personal guard and she has been killed, and while you hear wild speculation on the how and why, no other details of her death are available. Unfortunately she has not named an heir and there are no clear successors. The regent calls for support in Corroch, traitors have risen up in Baol, the band is promised to Draíod. What do you do?

With no named successor, Regent Cian Treebreaker tried to maintain stability until a new Réig could be confirmed. While many voiced quiet concerns about his advanced age and the risk of leaving Tirneach without a ruler, those concerns soon turned out to be misplaced, as some remaining members of the Riverborn sect organised killings across Corroch. While Gallóglagh and House Guards tried to maintain order, some Riverborn managed to sneak through their thin stretched ranks and assassinate the Regent Cian Treebreaker. Another member of House Roaring Thunder, Tiergan, managed to slay the assassins as they attempted to leave the grounds. Through a combination of personal charisma and some well judged shows of force, Tiergan claimed the position of Head of House Roaring Thunder and with it, Regent of Tirneach. Though continuity was maintained, the transition further delayed the confirmation of legitimate Réig candidates and caused widespread unease through the waterways of Uasa and beyond.

In Baol, Mairi of clann Niamha staged an attempt to claim the throne through violent disregard of tradition. Malcontent highlanders from all Clanns flocked to her call and savagely murdered any who opposed them. Highland and lowland Riders alike were gutted and dragged through their Ridings behind horses to intimidate the rest into supporting "Réig" Mairi. Despite this, Iarla Dalles of Clann Niamha rallied opposition to her and put out the call for aid. Gallóglagh from several bands answered her call, including members of Cumhacht na Réig. Some Gallóglagh protected Riders, Cinnirí, other public figures, and their families from coercion and assassination. Others kept watch, gathered information, and lobbied prominent figures to oppose Mairi's campaign of terror.

With the aid of the Friendly Hand Trade Guild, the Gallóglaiigh rallied under Rider Tiernan Mac Aonghusa and slowly turned the tide on Mairi. After several weeks of protecting ridings and repelling ambushes, Tiernan's forces went on the attack. Several members of Cumhacht na Réig had fortuitously scouted the area months beforehand, allowing them to pinpoint the routes the rebels would likely take and set up ambushes of their own, catching the rebels between members of Cumhacht na Réig and the Friendly Hand guild on one side, and loyal members of Clanns Aongusa and Niamha on the other. Mairi Ni Niamha, now known as Mairi the Brute, was finally pinned down and slain by Tiernan at the Battle of Scarlet Heather. Many of her key supporters were also killed in the battle and the majority of those remaining surrendered soon after.

At the same time, many other members of Cumhacht na Réig travelled to Ardbealach, Draíod, to complete a mission arranged before the former Réig died. What was anticipated to be several days of guarding a ritual circle from Gwyllt attack turned into weeks of siege warfare as an unprecedented host of Caorthainnigh assault the ritual circle outside Ardbealach. Scholars of religion and magic among the defenders found the scent of burnt meat clinging in their nostrils and acrid grease in their mouth long before the battle brought those foul sensations to all present.

Reliable accounts put the Gwyllt's numbers in the hundreds, more dramatic accounts say thousands, and it seemed as if no sooner had one been felled than three more had taken to the field, with even those slain rising shortly thereafter as Sluagh. While many Gallóglaiigh, torchbearers, and local militia fought the Gwyllt directly, other Gallóglaiigh kept careful watch over the area, ensuring that supply lines were maintained and organising to feed the defenders, and working to keep morale from breaking.

While the Gallóglaiigh held the main circle a scouting party of Caorthainnigh found a nearby secondary ritual circle and began performing their foul rite. Thankfully, some Gallóglaiigh of the band had scouted the area in advance and quickly called attention to it, disrupting the ritual before it could reach its unholy conclusion, though some witnesses close to the lake at the time swore that the waters began to boil and reek of sulphur. The campaign was a drawn out affair, and the enemy hordes were daunting, so some began trapping vast quantities of the Sluagh and Gwyllt corpses yet to rise in disused tunnels before sealing them off, trapping them in the hopes of keeping the enemy forces at a manageable level.

While scouting nearby mountain passes for likely tunnels to use for this purpose, some Weeping members of the band discovered a tunnel locked with a heavy metal grate, and could just make out the sounds of people

calling for help. Investigating inside they found an abandoned laboratory with over a dozen non-Weeping Corpses, three corpses of Weeping of various species, and three still living Weeping. The survivors told of a Linebreaker Vartach who was experimenting on them and killing people they had abducted until one captive, a Fathach, rose as a Weeping and managed to surprise and fight off the Vartach and the one remaining guard, who fled and locked them inside. The three surviving Weeping were rescued and evacuated below ground, away from the battle with the Gwyllt.

After weeks of holding the lake side circle and frustrating Gwyllt attempts to perform their ritual, one night the ley lines shifted ever so slightly, disempowering all ritual circles within a mile of the lake. Their morale seemingly sapped, the rest of the Gwyllt in the area were more easily put down and packed into disused tunnels. After the ritual circle moved, those band members sensitive to matters of religion and magic could no longer sense the smell and taste of burning ash.

Elsewhere, attempts to reach the Shaper's Steps failed repeatedly, as harsh storms smashed any ship that tried to make the crossing, preventing any investigation into the former Réig's death.

Causing further chaos in Corroch, members of the self proclaimed Breaker Heresy stormed the headquarters of House Roaring Thunder, claiming that if they exterminated them then no Réig could ever again be crowned. A group of them managed to hack their way into the room where Regent Tiergan was consulting with the Prelates. In a desperate skirmish, Tiergan managed to hold them off by arcane force long enough for Gallóglagh to come to his aid, though he was badly injured in the process. After a fierce and bloody battle that left several waterways choked with the corpses of Breaker Heretics, the combined forces of House Roaring Thunder and those galloglaigh who heeded the Regent's call for defenders were able to quash the assassination attempt while sustaining no losses and only few injuries that were quickly healed.

Over the months, Gwyllt attacks became more rampant and aggressive across the Five Realms, something that many attributed to the absence of a Réig. New and previously unknown variants of Gwyllt began to appear across the land with many specifically targeting Cinnirí and Gallóglagh, putting many smaller communities at risk of losing the services and structures they rely on, and their only defence against the usual threats of bandits, the undead, and beasts.

Amidst the public outcry for a new Réig to be named dozens of would-be Réigs announced themselves, many previously unknown and citing a vague and poorly defined kinship to the previous Réig. A few candidates stand out from the crowd for their deeds, qualifications, or support.

The first of these is Éalthna Ni Órfhaiche, the Leasiar Iarla of Siabhal for the last eight decades, and one of its wealthiest landowners. Formerly an active Cinnire of the Order of Teachers, they left active service long ago to devote their time to tending to the matters of ruling Siabhal. Their skills in statecraft and productive compromise are credited with bringing increasing success and prosperity to Siabhal. They count the majority of the Ruby families and some significant church figures amongst their most vocal supporters. They're seen as a steady hand who will guide Tirneach out of this terrible turmoil and back to prosperity.

The second is Tiernan Mac Aongusa, the Human Rider of Dhaloch in Baol, vanquisher of the Bloodwater Spirits and slayer of Mairi the Brute and her forces at the battle of Scarlet Heather. He has the support of the guilds, and has managed to gain the approval of large numbers of both Highlanders and Lowlanders, who recount his great deeds of derring-do and martial cunning with varying degrees of enthusiasm and begrudgery. Fresh off his victories in Baol, he is seen as a hero of Tirneach, ready to lead the charge to push back all those who would assault the Shaper's favoured land.

Lastly, from Draíod comes an unlikely figure: Amhlaoibh, a Weeping Fathach rescued from the laboratory of a Linebreaker Vartach by Cumhacht na Réig near Ardbealach. In their first life they had been the lifelong servant, guard and confidant of one of the Saoi. Lured into the clutches of this Linebreaker by some of their minions, they were murdered but immediately rose back up as a Weeping, thwarting the Linebreaker's schemes and driving them off. Most significantly, they have apparently risen with their soul bearing a Mark of Destiny, which the Saoi of Draíod hail as an omen that they have been sent to lead Draíod (and Tirneach as a whole) into a new golden age and to oppose the menaces of the undead and gwyllt (and Linebreakers.) So far their most vocal supporters are the Saoi of Draíod, though they are attracting attention from across the five realms. Following a period of such fear and uncertainty, their dramatic tale and the Saoi's pronouncement of their remarkable destiny has many looking to them as a symbol of hope and rebirth, ready to lead Tirneach to something new and glorious.

In light of the ongoing Gwyllt threat, once the treachery of Mairi the Brute is resolved, the Regent and Iarla's of each Realm issue a joint edict ordering all galloglaigh to travel to a realm capital and remain there to ensure

security and stability until the new Réig is appointed.

The current Thane of Cumhacht na Réig, Declan Ó Ceallaigh, makes it known that he only came out of retirement as a favour to Réig Méalaine, and will be retiring again the second there is a new Réig in place. However, he quietly reassures members of Cumhacht na Réig that any Réig who isn't an eejit will leap at the chance to reform the band under some highly prestigious Gallóglaiigh Thane for how auspicious it will look, to show that normal order is resuming and to display their strength.

Two Years of Turmoil

The two years following the death of Maeláine Uí Chonchobhair were a time of great fear and uncertainty. In the absence of a Réig, the Gwyllt ran rampant across Tirneach, terrorising the people and forcing them to dedicate themselves to little besides the defence of their communities. The first summer without a Réig was a trial, the second proved to be a harrowing of the Relams. Many, among the learned and the superstitious alike, proclaimed this an ill omen and a clear sign that a new Réig, any Réig, was needed immediately to bring peace and restore order. Others counselled patience, warning that no one should want a return to the chaos of three Réigs in fewer than six years (or, perhaps more importantly, the six years of draconian order under Duarcán the Grim that followed it). In any case, Tiergan was unmoved by calls for expedience as he judged the would-be Réigs and weighed their support and aptitudes.

"It's bad luck not to have a Réig. First Réig took down the Gwyllt, what do you think they'll do when there's none?" - Mothó, shepherd of Bruid.

The Realms' capitals received reinforcement from the Gallóglaiigh, though not all of them as much as they would have liked or needed. Favouritism came into play as many Thanés sought to protect their own home Realms while others simply marched to whatever capital was nearest when the call came. Some bands, which were between campaigns or taking rest when they received the order, ended up scattered across several Realms as their members took it upon themselves to decide where their help was needed most. A few bands even experienced serious schisms over the issue of which capital deserved their aid. Many Gallóglaiigh took the time to have themselves formally transferred to another band so that they could serve in the capital closest to their families and loved ones, but a handful simply took their own leave and joined up with bands known to not ask too many questions.

“I’ll never forget it. My kids and I were running from some awful things that wanted to eat us, and out of the woods come two warriors, howling a battle cry. They saved our lives. Must have been Golden Knives, they had these tarnished brooches on in the shape of daggers.” - Ualainn, farmer of Baol.

Some folk who lived in isolated and rural parts of Tirneach fled their homes to seek shelter in the better defended cities but for those who remained there was one unusual source of support. Shortly after the call to defend the capitals, the Regent announced that it had been discovered that the late Réig's Gallóglagh band, the Golden Knives, had never formally been decommissioned after she took the crown, and that he recognised Aster Ua Larkspur as the standing Thane of that band. It seemed a strange thing for the Regent to bother with amid all the turmoil but shortly afterwards open letters were received in many of the towns and villages around Tirneach. They claimed that Aster had been given authority over all Gallóglagh who had been separated from their bands and ordered them to join them to receive further orders. The letters also specified that any Gallóglach travelling to meet Aster was to do all they could to ensure the safety of the roads and outlying settlements as they travelled. The orders did not specify Aster's location.

“I’ll never forget it. I was on the road, surveying my own fields if you don’t mind, when these two ruffians show up out of the woods. They blocked my way and demanded that I pay the Regent’s Tax, or they couldn’t guarantee my safety. Must have been those Golden Knives, they had these shining brooches in the shape of daggers.” - Cillian, farmer of Baol.

Many initially took the orders to be a hoax or perhaps some kind of trap but the Regent did nothing to disavow Aster's claim to authority and as the months went on "members" of the Golden Knives began to be seen wandering the roads of Tirneach. Always on their way to meet their Thane and always watchful for threats overlooked by the capitals, both supernatural and mundane.

The Fate of Corroch

Regent Tiergan put out the call for Gallóglagh to reinforce the capital city of Corroch, and enough heeded his summons to hold the Gwyllt at bay. Bands of Gallóglagh co-ordinated the defence of Uasa’s roads and waterways and for the most part held the Gwyllt away from the city. Those who were tasked with keeping peace in the city witnessed something disturbing however as many of the fishers who supplied Corroch with a

good portion of its sustenance began to act strangely. Fights would break out between friends who'd worked together amiably for decades, often turning violent. Others claimed they were being watched or followed, often accusing those closest to them of spying on them and trying to reveal their secrets (whether they had any secrets or not). Investigation revealed that all those afflicted had caught one of the strange, one-eyed fish that had recently been sighted in the waters. The creatures were immediately revealed to be Gwyllt and their paranoia-inducing effects seemed to be temporary so long as further contact with them was avoided. The presence of the Gwyllt fish made the vital work of the fishers a tense and unpleasant affair.

"I've fished in these waters since I was a child, never had to watch my haul so closely before." - Borgach, fisher of Uasa.

However, the schemes of the Gwyllt soon turned out to be the least of the Uasaigh's problems. While surviving members of the Riverborn and the Breaker Heresy continued to make a nuisance of themselves, a new group soon eclipsed them. Calling themselves "Lobhan's Legacy", they claimed to be champions of Siabhal and called on the Regent to immediately anoint Iarla Ni Órfhaiche as Réig, appoint "any backwater fishtickler" as Iarla of Uasa, and move the Crown Realm to Siabhal. Naturally, the Regent disregarded their demands as irritating bluster. That was until the very next night, when the group arranged the murders of several Uasaigh Riders. A gold crown splattered with red dots was left painted on the walls at each of the murder scenes. Iarla Ni Órfhaiche fervently disavowed this group and their actions and began a rigorous hunt for the perpetrators. While investigations into these killings were underway, Corroch suffered its most concerted attack from the Gwyllt. For several days beforehand it had been reported that more and more of the unsettling one-eyed Gwyllt fish were turning up in the waterways around Corroch. The Gallóglagh who had been posted throughout the area around the city were quickly alerted when the creatures began to gather in turbulent shoals and merged their bodies together, forming larger and larger monstrosities with more and more glassy, staring eyes. Some of the amalgam fish creatures were destroyed by quick reacting Gallóglagh but most of them were able to swim towards the city as the warriors out on patrol rushed to keep up with them.

On the outskirts of the Corroch the creatures began once again to merge and soon a hulking, amorphous horror, covered in thousands of accusing eyes dragged itself out of the waters of Uasa and began slouching towards the Citadel of the Shaper. Several Gallóglagh and fishers were crushed under its slimy bulk as it slid inexorably towards the Citadel, destroying boats, bridges, nets, and traps as it went. Word soon reached the defenders that Regent Tiergan was attending a meeting with the full Prelate Council in the Citadel, not that

they needed any additional incentive to protect the Shaper's Citadel from the awful Gwyllt. At first it seemed that nothing could deter the monster from its course. Under a hail of blows from the warriors assembled, it never slowed or changed its course but lashed out all round it with fins and tails that emerged and dissolved from its disgusting form. Gallóglaiigh whose skin came into contact with the ichor of the beast were immediately affected by an intense and violent paranoia, turning upon their allies. Eventually, with the creature coming within an arrow-shot of the Citadel, several mages began casting Fear over it. While the great beast initially resisted, eventually the effect took hold, causing the monster to erupt in ichor as every individual Gwyllt fish making it up tried to flee a different way. So armed, the Gallóglaiigh were able to drive the creature away from the Citadel before it could reform into its full size. Badly wounded, and kept from its prey, dozens of the smaller horrors dissolved back into the waters from whence they came. Despite the investigations, the true identities of the Legacy remain unknown. Sightings of the Gwyllt fish have become rare but they have not disappeared entirely. For the Uasaigh of Corroch, this was a time of anxiety for coming threats and longing for a new Réig deserving of their loyalty.

The Fate of Barr

Traditionally safe and secure Barr attracted the concern of few Gallóglaiigh and the Riders and Ruby Families of Siabhal concerned themselves primarily with the defence of historic Iomra over the actual capital. Though Siabhal has typically suffered less from the Gwyllt threat than the other Realms, this drastically changed in the absence of the Réig. Ridings such as Sciatrian were cut off for months. Massive Gwyllt formed from crumbling marble and hosts of smaller creatures reported to look like ghoulish scarecrows accompanied common Gwyllt monstrosities as they prowled the Ridings of Siabhal. The Gallóglaiigh in Barr found themselves spending most of the long season co-ordinating the meagre forces present to stretch as far as they could. Patrols through the farmlands worked desperately to keep the fields safe enough to be worked as they were menaced not just by Gwyllt but by mortal bandits and looters as well as vermin, grown bold in the chaos. As the second summer began, the already severe Gwyllt attacks spiked sharply, and the harried Gallóglaiigh were finally overwhelmed. A terrible Gwyllt mockery of a massive tower burst without warning through Barr's city square as the sun reached its midday peak, and immediately began to crumble and collapse. Dozens of bystanders, including Iarla Ní Órfhaiche and several Riders were caught in the torrent of debris. Fortunately there were just enough Gallóglaiigh to manage the crowd and to fight off the smaller Gwyllt that poured out of the broken tower. Drina of House Roaring Thunder was able to drag the Iarla to safety, where she could be stabilised before she bled out. As the dust settled, the Gallóglaiigh heard a terrible sound in the distance and saw on the horizon that

Iomra itself had fared even worse. They looked on in horror as one of the three storied towers of Iomra, built by Leasiar during the old Kingdom of Siabhal, was smashed to pieces and fell from view.

“How bold these creatures have grown, if they can strike at the very Heart of the Realms. They will never stop.” - Búbha Ní Shiúin, courtier of Iomra.

The assembled Gallóglaigh managed to save who they could among the Ruby Families, though fires scorched many of the fields, and barrithes and other pests devoured others. The local Riders and Gallóglaigh on hand were able to organise logistics and guard enough to avoid the threat of famine in Siabhal. However, many merchants cancelled shipments to other Realms or sharply raised their prices, citing shortages and increased demand, which led to their neighbours contemplating taking by force what they couldn't buy with coin. For the Siabhlaigh of Barr, this was a time of loss and fear for what will come next, even as some saw opportunity in the crisis.

The Fate of Uaircinn

Although the Treachery of Mairi the Brute was put to an end, many were still concerned about Baol's stability, and enough Gallóglaigh mustered on Uaircinn to relieve the city's militia from the Gwyllt onslaught. As the city became ever more crowded by those seeking shelter, Gallóglaigh in Uaircinn found themselves struggling to keep the peace within the city as much as they fought to keep safe its walls. Disputes between clans, between guilds, between Highlanders and Lowlanders, and between those who had fought for Iarla Dalles and those who were suspected of still harbouring loyalty to Mairí threatened to tear the city apart from within.

“I have seen the Amber Hall, shining in the night. It calls to me, and I must answer. You counsel patience, but would you counsel forgiveness if I lost such a chance?” - A note left by Ian Mac Donnchadha, before his disappearance.

“It's clear to me now that only some terrible Gwyllt creature would set such a ruinous rate, and I have the word of two Torchbearers who agree. I am sorry for your loss, but you must now see that the agreement between your guildmate and me is null and void.” - A fragment of a letter sent to the Friendly Hand guild.

Particularly vigilant Gallóglaigh who were securing a major meeting between the Trade Guilds and representatives from a number of Highland clans unmasked “Casey”, head of the Friendly Hand guild and a

hero of the battle of Scarlet Heather, as a Gwyllt imposter. The Gwyllt was cut down before it could escape but not before it drew a twisted horn and blew a blast of sound that caused fear and nausea in all around it. This was the opening salvo in a terrible battle as more Gwyllt impostors revealed themselves and opened the gates to the city. Gwyllt poured through the streets and the ensuing battle was long and bloody, claiming many lives, including that of the real Casey and Etain, head of the Polished Smile Trade Guild. Tiernan Mac Aongusa was almost counted among the dead, were he not spotted by Gallóglaigh, lying face down in a side-street, a poisoned blade stuck in his back. In the aftermath of the battle the city was searched thoroughly for any more Gwyllt impostors but none were found. Still, suspicion remained, as did a sense of uncertainty over how long some people have been replaced for and some embarrassment over how the leaders of the city had been manipulated. Mistrust and a paralysing caution slowed down the appointment of new Guild Heads, which in turn hampered trade and the supply of vital goods across the Lowlands and other Realms.

The Highlands had their own tragedy to contend with, as the heirs of every courtly Clann (except for the wandering heir of Clann Mac Tire) received signs and visions of a translucent amber castle in a rocky field, ringing with the sounds of laughter, song and battle. They became certain that these visions would lead them to the site of the Amber Hall, where they would find long lost power that could defend Baol from the Gwyllt. Even the scions of long rival clans worked together to decipher the visions and reveal the location hidden within. Their elders counselled patience, to allow their scholars and those visiting from among the Gallóglaigh to study their accounts and for Gallóglaigh to be sent in arms to scout the area first. Full of headstrong ideas of destiny, many of the heirs ignored this advice and snuck away together to follow their visions and bring the salvation of Baol. When Gallóglaigh scouts were sent after them they found only undead waiting to greet them. The grim abominations were all that was left of the heirs of the Courtly Clanns. For the Baolaigh of Uaircinn this was a time of loss and suspicion.

The Fate of Crag Oscionn

With the recent incursion of the Blazing Host near Ardbealach still fresh in the public memory, many Gallóglaigh answered Iarla Marblespine's call to reinforce Crag Oscionn, capital of Draíod, against potential threats. Gallóglaigh patrolled any tunnels that led to the surface, guarding the Arcane College and the Shrine, or kept peace between spirited scholars. Though some few Gwyllt managed to find their way down below, they were soon caught by patrols and subdued easily enough for the most part. The real trouble in Crag Oscionn came from a mortal threat. Excess water in a few tunnels surrounding the Arcane College immediately caused alarm among the Draíodaigh but before anything could be done about it the trickles

became torrents and tunnels began to flood. Experienced Draíodaigh tunnel dwellers had begun their calm and orderly evacuation when the halls began to ring with screams. Tunnels once blocked off by collapse or by intention had been opened by the rushing waters and the undead thought safely contained within them, including a number of the Sluagh from the recent siege, were set loose in Crag Oscionn. The Gallóglaiigh lept into action, guarding the evacuees and pinning down the abominations. The Gallóglaiigh guarded the engineers who pumped the water from the tunnels and once the area was traversable once more, they were the first to enter and clear any remaining dangers. In the aftermath, evidence of sabotage was discovered and blame was laid at the foot of a gang of Broken Chains attempting to destroy the Arcane College as revenge for rejecting them.

“At first I thought it was shining cave moss. Then I saw it move. And kill.” - Slinn, Fathach of Draíod

The Arcane College was relocated to several smaller off site facilities for the months it took to clean and repair the affected areas. Some particularly observant Gallóglaiigh noticed the flood had weakened supports of tunnels above, and raised concerns of sinkholes opening that could allow the Gwyllt to swarm en masse from the surface directly to the Shrine of the Shaper. Many Gallóglaiigh were dispatched to the surface to rid the area of the remnants of the Blazing Host as well as several roaming gangs of Knochenbriseadh, Maca Rí and a strange type of blindingly shining Gwyllt. Others helped with the repair of the tunnels below and kept ever more careful guard to prevent further acts of sabotage. For the Draíodaigh of Crag Oscionn, this was a time of vigilance and suspicion.

The Fate of Caorioc

Caorioc is an important trade hub, and the most northerly town in Bruid. Nowhere in Bruid is far enough away from the Great Forest to be entirely safe however, particularly at this time. Enough Gallóglaiigh heeded Iarla Sionnach's call for aid to prevent the Gwyllt and the Great Forest overtaking the settlement. They had their work cut out for them though, as more Knochenbriseadh than had ever seen before lumbered out of the forest with tree trunk clubs and battering rams to smash down the city walls. Meanwhile, mobs of Wenigadaí crept through the streets, looking to feast on unguarded supplies. It wasn't just Gwyllt besetting the settlement though, as the unsettled dead and fierce beasts forced out of the forest by the disturbances also had to be repelled. The nights inside the city were not much more peaceful, as Gallóglaiigh had to mediate disputes between the comfortable wool merchants of Caorioc and the more rugged Bruidigh of the forest who had come to seek shelter within the city walls. With great effort and the assistance of new arrivals from

Schlachtfeld (on a pilgrimage to find mighty challenges to prove their worth), they managed to keep too many people from either killing each other or dying to one of the many threats that surrounded the city.

“As I cowered in the main square of Caorioc, with laughing Krieger dispatching foul beasts all around me, I became certain that the Long Peace was finally over.” - Tarlann, scribe of Bruid.

“No-one has ever seen it happen, but there are those who swear they’ve heard the trees move. I reckon the Gwyllt can herd them, like we herd sheep.” - Mothó, shepherd of Bruid.

One misty moonless night, a horde of undead crawled out of the river and laid siege to the infirmary tents which had become a necessity in the city. Iarla Sionnach himself was the first to notice the approach of the awful creatures and raised the alarm. For several minutes the Iarla, his personal guard Abaigh of House Roaring Thunder, and a few of the wounded strong enough to hold spears were all that stood between the abominations and a slaughter in the infirmary camp. Thankfully, it didn't take long for the Gallóglaigh, strengthened by the Moonlit Vigil, to arrive and lay waste to the foe and prevent the massacre. It was hard and constant work to keep Caoiroc safe and while they took solace in the faces of those they'd kept safe within the city, the Gallóglaigh looked out beyond the city's walls at a much more dispiriting sight. The strange, inexorable trees of the Great Forest spread out northwards week by week until soon the border of the forest was scarcely south of the city itself. Many settlements were completely cut off within the sprawl of the forest, their fate entirely unknown and those who were able to reach Caoiroc brought word of a terrible creature. A new and powerful Gwyllt, with a wide and grinning maw that consumed all that it destroyed and left no remains behind it. For the Bruidigh of Caoiroc this was a time of courage in the face of fear.

A New Réig at Last

Uncertainty cannot go on forever though, and this time eventually came to an end. The people of Tirneach began to lose their patience for Regent Tiergan's caution. As the third summer without a Réig approached, the devastating attacks of the previous year loomed large in people's memories and demands for Tiergan to recognise a candidate reached a fraught peak. Many folks began to claim that the tradition of House Roaring Thunder anointing the Réig was ceremonial only, and pressure built on the would-be Réigs to simply seize the throne and end the turmoil. Tiergan was seemingly unmoved by the threat of civil unrest, much to the alarm of his advisors. Pretenders to the Throne were weighed and winnowed, many disregarded without serious thought, some carefully given reason to leave the capital, a few others receiving persuasive visits from warriors

loyal to the Regent. The Weeping Fathach Amhlaobh failed to gain many supporters outside of the Saoi. Finally Tiergan's bodyguards were able to breathe a sigh of relief as the Regent announced he would recognise the winner of a duel between Iarla Éalthna Ni Órfhaiche and Rider Tiernan Mac Aongusa as Réig of Tirneach.

There was great excitement as preparations for the duel took place and many risked the dangerous journeys from outlying Ridings to come and bear witness to it. The morning of the duel was rife with rumour and suspicion. It was whispered there had been dramatic events the night before and that the Prelates of the Counsellors and the Teachers had been summoned to Iarla Ni Órfhaiche's quarters in the dead of the night. As the appointed time for the duel arrived the Iarla was nowhere to be seen and the assembled crowd began to argue whether or not victory by default would be enough to win Tiernan the throne. A few long minutes passed before Éalthna Ni Órfhaiche strode onto the field, resplendent in brightly polished gold armour, a worn and well cared for sword by her side. Seeming not even to notice the crowd, the Iarla walked straight to Tiernan Mac Aongusa and knelt before him. Uproar seized those gathered and even Tiernan was visibly startled by the gesture. Éalthna revealed that she had received a vision from the Shaper the night before and that she believed it was the Shaper's will that Tiernan serve as Réig and return Tirneach to safety and prosperity. Tiernan Mac Aongusa was crowned as Réig that very day.

As the new Réig was confirmed, Thane Ó Ceallaigh formally announced his retirement from the Gallóglagh, to take a well earned rest running a small farm east of Urcheol. He was not alone, as more than a few Gallóglagh were exhausted from the two years of constant vigilance and chose to leave service. Others, having been in one place for such a long time, decided to put the travelling life of a Gallóglach behind them and settle down. The promise of adventure, glory, and wealth was enough to keep many more still serving, and to tempt new recruits who had seen and benefitted from the Gallóglagh's presence during the Season of Uncertainty.

Réig Tiernan took early action to mobilise the Gallóglagh bands to provide aid across the Realms where it was sorely needed. As part of this effort, he decreed that the band Cumhacht na Réig was to reunite under Thane Ualgarg Corcra of House Cleansing Rain, a Drakeblooded Torchbearer who had been the Cinnire-at-Arms of White Eye's Band. The decree went out that any members of the band that still upheld the Oaths were to begin travelling to Siabhal and muster under their Thane at Barr. This was a golden opportunity for new recruits eager to prove themselves to join the band as well.