

VAOZUM: THE AGE OF INVASIONS

In *remote antiquity*, the continent of Vaozum was overrun with the foul spawn of the incomprehensible Outer Gods. This was the **Age of Abominations**.

7,500 years ago dragons drove the abominations underground and reigned over the cities of the Serpent Men. This was the **Age of Serpents**.

1,500 years ago the the dragons fell mute, the Serpent Men were reduced to a few scattered cities, and Giants assumed mastery of Vaozum. Thus began the **Age of Giants**.

500 years ago the Kingdoms of the Giants fell, and the first Elves landed on the shores of Vaozum. Thus began the **Age of Invasions**.

Now the Five Elven Courts are at the height of their power and glory, but are beset with intrigues and factional infighting. They are locked in nearly constant wars with the relentless Imperial Dwarves and the vicious Goblinoid Dictatorships. The degenerate Giants yet linger in isolated strongholds. Humanity, the most recent immigrant to Vaozum, finds itself struggling to survive in the middle of all factions. The ruined cities of Serpent Men and Giants are the refuge of horrible creatures. The forces of Chaos threaten at every turn. Most of Vaozum remains monster-haunted wilderness, where civilization is imposed at the cost of blood.

The Races of Vaozum

Elves are the greatest race of Vaozum, arrogant masters of both sword and spell. They first arrived on the continent 500 years ago, after the islands of their homeland sank beneath the sea. The superior technology and magic of the Elves has enabled them to create the largest kingdoms of all the races. While known for the beauty of their art and literature, Elves are also often self-indulgent, factitious, and petty - facts that are often exploited by their enemies. The Elves are currently dependent on Halfling farmers for their food, and Human mercenaries to maintain their armies. Their close alliance with the Fae creatures of the land, however, adds greatly to their power.

Each Elven Court is descended from the population of a single one of the Sunken Isles, and each Court is nominally ruled by both an elected King and Queen. The various local Princes, Princesses, Lords and Ladies are the real powers, however, and they have the right to maintain private armies. These private armies are often employed against each other in disputes ranging from tastes in music to who has the right to frolic under a particular tree. While Elves almost never kill each other (fighting to submission instead), they will allow their mercenaries to slaughter each other in great numbers. All Elven nobility are elected to their offices for 100 year terms, and many seemingly ordinary Elves have formerly been nobility. Since Elven society treats males and females as complete equals, a noble is equally likely to be male or female.

The *Eastern Court of Spring*, also called the *Unicorn Kingdom*, occupies the forested northeast of Vaozum. It's people are the most conservative (and arrogant) of the Elves, and are descended from the traditionally dominant class of the Sunken Isles. They are sometimes called *Gray Elves*. Mounted on hippogriffs and war stags, the Knights and Dames of the Eastern

Court are feared by all.

The *Western Court of Autumn* is also known as the *Butterfly Kingdom*. It occupies the northwest of Vaozum, and its inhabitants are known for their outlandish tastes. They are sometimes called *High Elves*. Their morals are extremely loose even by Elven standards. They allow humans to mingle freely with them, and often take human lovers.

The *Northern Court of Winter*, also called the *White Stag Kingdom*, occupies the extreme northeastern fringe of Vaozum, and extends into the frozen realm of Uetherland, homeland of the Dwarves. Its inhabitants are often called *Snow Elves*. Fierce warriors and masters of weather magic, they often employ bears as battle steeds.

The *Solar Court*, also known as *Adjirah* and the *Griffin Kingdom*, lies within the vast central desert of Vaozum. Its people are nomadic, dwelling in gold and silk pavilions of magically-created luxury. They are also called *Sand Elves* by humans.

The *Southern Court of Summer*, or *Parrot Kingdom*, occupies the jungles of the southwest and southeast. They often build their homes out of the living trees themselves, and are known as the best archers of all Elves. Humans often call them *Wood Elves*.

Elves are pantheists, have no clergy, and celebrate festivals whenever they think having one would be enjoyable.

Dwarves are the relentless rivals of the Elves, ruling mountainside cities that extend deep into the Earth. They arrived in Vaozum a decade after the Elves, counterattacking after Elves seized part of the surface of the Dwarven homeland of Uetherland. The Dwarves mostly control the extreme northeast of Vaozum, but they also have cities in most mountainous regions. Dwarves possess highly developed military technology, and hold the secret to the manufacture of plate armor suits. The Dwarves are also dependent on the Halflings for much of their food, but employ far fewer Human mercenaries than the Elves. Many rare minerals can only be obtained by dealing with Dwarven merchants, who are known to be avaricious, humorless, and quick to take offense.

Each Dwarven city is ruled by its own King, but all Dwarven Kings must pay homage to the Dwarven All-King who reigns from a massive complex deep within the mountains of the Northern realm of Uetherland. The Dwarves do not sail, but have used their incredible mining skills to create a network of underground tunnels linking their cities.

Dwarves are strict monotheists, and any Dwarf who follows a god other than the All-Father will be killed as a heretic.

Gnomes appear to be native to Vaozum. The Gnomes possess fine technology that exceeds even that of the Elves and Dwarves. The Gnomes do not usually apply their technological skills to military uses (other than their invention of the crossbow), and appear completely uninterested in conquest. Gnomish engineers are often employed to create marvelous underground constructions for other races. Such structure often incorporate strangely humorous features. Gnomes love money and trade, and often function as middle men when the Elves and Dwarves need to have non-military dealings with each other. Each Gnomish community is completely autonomous, and

Gnomes will readily take up residence in the settlements of other races.

Gnomes follow a religion that blends a sensible kind of monotheism with a humorous approach to life.

Halflings arrived in Vaozum with the Elves and Dwarves. They have no nations of their own, but comprise about half the population of both of both the Elven and Dwarven nations, effectively forming a peasant class. Halflings have no actual clergy, and their religion revolves around sacrifices to a vaguely defined deity known simply as "The Corn God". Recently, however, a Prophet named Yarib has emerged among them, spreading a gospel of self-respect and independence.

Hobgoblins rule large swaths of Vaozum, and exact cruel tributes from all they conquer. Their society is based on slavery and plunder, and they treat the Goblins, Kobolds, and other humanoid races as second-class citizens. Humans are fit to be slaves in the Hobgoblin view, but demi-humans are fit only to be eaten. The Hobgoblins have lost massive amounts of territory to the newer races, and they neither forgive, nor forget. Legends claim that the Goblinoids were created by the Serpent People to be merciless soldiers

The Hobgoblins (and other humanoids) are currently devotees of the various Demon-Gods of the Outer Darkness.

Humans first arrived in Vaozum 200 years ago, and are descended from four main races, which are now forming into separate ethnicities.

The *Beneza* (also called *Benezites*) are dark haired and olive complexioned, and arrived from the East after their original homeland became uninhabitable. In the grasslands and dry plains of eastern Vaozum they have split into the Kasar, Tzakumai, Yash, Adu, Kimurish, and Bubak tribes. In the jungles of the southeast they have become the Godal, and Ond tribes, and have mixed with the Zimbu to create the Isav. In the vast central desert the tribes of the Bin Yosuz, Indras, and Zamurite nomads have arisen. Far to the west is the tribe of Aub, now ruled by wizard-priests. Farther west than the Aub, the Beneza have mixed with Aerasians to create the tribes of Eulux, Sacyr, Zaerex, Gasod, and Katzos. The original religion of the Beneza was the worship of Iohah, the Lord of Life and Death, but many now pay homage to myriad deities, and some have even fallen into cults of Chaos.

The pale *Aerasians* came from the far North, after their paradisaical homeland was destroyed by volcanic eruptions. They have also split into many different tribes, often as the result of being granted widely separated regions as settlements by the Elves. In the densely forested northeast the Berze, Rozar, Shamare, Alemon and Drass tribes have formed. In the fertile lands of the north-central region, the Gal, Uld, Pelemor, Herad, Calesean, and Dasan tribes have coalesced. In the cold woods of the northwest the Hatysh and Czerekite tribes now dwell. The Aerasians of the western woods, grasslands, and deserts have mixed with the Benezites to form the tribes of Eulux, Sacyr, Zaerex, Gasod, and Katzos. The Aerasians generally hold the Druids as their priests, and worship the god Ca Bil and the goddess Mari.

The brown-skinned and sloe-eyed tribe of *Lavola* came

across the waters of the far west, following the instructions of their god Huisizo. In the jungles of the Southwest they have become the Ombrotl and Vanatzin tribes. Moving further towards the central desert, the Lavolans have also become the Tahonia people.

The black-skinned *Zimbu* people came from the lands of the far south, fleeing devastating floods. On the vast, Gnoll-infested island of Nagato they have broken into the Omeddu, Shubas, Ega, and Fulaza tribes. The religion of the Zimbu tribes is animistic, with a strong emphasis on invocation of the ancestors.

Humans have just begun to build some permanent cities, and are viewed by both Elves and Dwarves as a convenient source of workers and mercenaries. Human dominions are often client states of one of the other powers, and serve as buffers between the stronger nations. Most humans are barbaric semi-nomads.

Miscellaneous Facts

The **Serpent People** are no longer seen. The last city of the Serpent People, Tyor-Uthaz, was destroyed by human slaves who fled to found the city of Osarta, taking the secret of Wizardry with them. The ruined cities of the Serpent People (and the Giants) still stand everywhere. The Dragons, who once ruled the Serpent People, can now neither speak or use magic. Persistent rumors state that Serpent Men are not dead, but slumber in hidden chambers underground.

Demi-Human technology is superior to Human in almost every way. Chainmail is an Elven invention, plate armor is possessed only by Dwarves, and Gnomes invented the crossbow. Humans prize the workmanship of non-human goods. Many human societies use barter as their primary form of trade.

Wizardry is a new art amongst Humanity. One story attributes the creation of human Wizardry to people who fled slavery at the hands of the last remaining Serpent People; another story claims it was invented in the Aubatian city of Mnexos. Wizards are rare and feared. The Elves are just beginning to notice that while much fewer in number than themselves, some human Wizards can wield magic far more powerful than that of the Elves.

Clerics are powerful, and divine miracles are frequently seen. Clerics are generally suspicious and dismissive of the new art of Wizardry. Many human societies are theocracies, and even secular governments will be heavily influenced by the clergy.

Slavery is practiced by Elves (who employ magical charms and drugs to create compliance), Humans (who use simple coercion), and Goblinoids (who routinely torture slaves and eat them when they are no longer useful). Dwarves, Gnomes, and Halfling never enslave.

The **Kingdoms of the Giants** appear to have fallen as a result of warfare and ecological collapse. Their once-green heartland was where the vast central desert of Vaozum now is. It is not known what connection may exist between the collapse of the Giant's empire, and the beginning of the cataclysmic events that led to the invasions of Vaozum.