

# An Adventurer's Guide to the Three Realms

## Geography

The world you know is divided into three great realms: **The Land**, a large flat disk surrounded on all sides by sea; the **Underworld**, home to dwarves, drow, gnomes and many dungeon monsters; and the **Overworld**, a realm of flying castles, cloud kingdoms and floating rocks. Other realities are known to exist - demons and gods must come from somewhere - but no person has ever seen them. Well, no reliable person anyway.

## The Dragon Empire

Link to full size map: [https://cdn.obsidianportal.com/assets/181686/13th\\_Age\\_Map.jpg](https://cdn.obsidianportal.com/assets/181686/13th_Age_Map.jpg)

The Dragon Empire occupies the majority of the Land. Its major cities are all located around a great expanse of water known as the **Midland Sea** which is kept magically calm by the wards of **The Archmage**, making travel between them a relatively short and pleasant experience. Away from the coast, things get wilder. Large areas of forest that are the realms of **The Elf Queen** and **The High Druid** occupy its northeast and southeast extremities respectively, and the west is bounded by a high range of mountains known as **Giantwalk**. To the east is the **Iron Sea**, a great impassable ocean that regularly spews forth kraken and mighty storms that lash the coastal regions. In the south is the **Red Wastes**, a dusty desert that is testament to the destructive powers of red dragons and the demons that occasionally escape from **The Abyss** that runs along its northwest edge. The **Frost Range** is the domain of **The Orc Lord** and his roving bands of orcs that menace the edges of the Empire and threaten to come closer.

## The Seven Cities

The seven great cities of the Empire are as follows:

### Axis, City of Swords

The Emperor's capital, set in the cone of an extinct volcano on the western shore of the Midland Sea. A good place for military types.

### Concord, City of Spires

A harmonious blend of elf spires and woodlands, carved dwarven holds, and Folk burrows and gardens. A haven, particularly for non-human people.

### Drakkenhall, Former Seat of Dragons

A half-ruined city formerly ruled by dragons and home to monsters. Now the sinister headquarters of **The Blue Sorceress**.

### Glitterhaegen, City of Coins

The commercial hub of the empire. A place of ostentatious wealth and grinding poverty. The proximity of **Shadowport**, realm of **The Prince of Shadows**, is no coincidence.

### Horizon, City of Wonders

A city of flying buildings and floating force ramps, arcane libraries and magical laboratories. The seat of **The Archmage**.

### New Port, City of Promise

A town founded by refugees. Its short, flat-topped buildings still give the impression of a city constructed in a hurry.

### Santa Cora, City of Gods

A spiritual and religious centre, dominated by **The Priestess' Cathedral**. Its other major industry is fishing, so the sea food is good.

## Magical Places

The Land has more than its fair share of magical locations, some beautiful, some horrifying. The **Court of Stars** can be found somewhere in the **Queen's Wood**, but only those with elven blood can find it. **Hellholes**, literal hells on earth, dot the land, particularly near **The Diabolist's** domain of **Hell Marsh**. **Cloudhome**, **High Dock** and **Starport** are conduits to the Overworld. **Omen**, the island in the centre of the Midland Sea that was the former administrative centre of **The Wizard King**, is such a centre of **Living Dungeon** activity that bits of it keep breaking off and drifting towards the nearby coasts. And **The Abyss** is a great gash in the earth full of floating islands of rock where the allies of **The Great Gold Wyrms** do unending battle with demonic incursions.

## The Icons

To understand the Icons of 13th Age, you must first understand **The Gods**.

It is generally agreed that the **Three Realms** were created by The Gods. It is also generally agreed that The Gods have ceased to concern themselves directly with their creation. Only the most superstitious believe that offering prayer, worship or sacrifice to The Gods will have any useful outcome.

Instead, the world is ruled by thirteen *Icons*, which arise from, or are, sources of magical, physical and spiritual power. Icons are not Gods - they have a physical form, and they are mortal. At the end of every Age, one or more Icons have fallen and new ones have taken their place. Some Icons are long-lived beings, such as **The Great Gold Wyrms**, while others are made up of successive people fulfilling the same role, such as **The Emperor** or **The Archmage**.

It is not clear what causes icons to arise in the first place. They are often associated with the rise of particular ancestries but they can also appear when new forms of magic enter the **Three Realms**, or ownership of a power source changes (as happened with **The Blue Sorceress**). Nor is it clear whether there always need to be thirteen ruling icons.

The following list describes the icons from the core rules of the game, with some changes. *They are not necessarily the icons that will exist in the campaign* - if the history demands it, some icons may be different.

## Heroic Icons

### The Archmage

Power base: **Horizon**

Successive Archmages have preserved the Empire for centuries by creating great magical wards that protect the land from incursions by hostile powers or otherworldly entities. Well, parts of the land, at least. Some have also threatened the fabric of reality with experiments that you'd have to be brilliant or hugely arrogant to attempt. The Archmage takes an interest in knowledge and magic in all its forms.

### The Emperor

Power base: **Axis**

The ruler and symbol of the **Dragon Empire**, the world's greatest (or at least most numerous) kingdom. His or her imperial legions bring order and safety - or stifling conformity - to its cities and towns. But emperors are mortal, and all the signs suggest that the age is turning. Will the Empire finally fall?

### The Great Gold Wyrm

Power base: **The Abyss**

The world's protector and the inspiration for holy orders of paladins and clerics. Long ago, in an act of supreme self-sacrifice, the Great Gold Wyrm used its physical form to seal the Abyss, a gap in reality through which otherworldly entities would otherwise pour. It has remained there ever since, tended by devoted acolytes, an inspiration to those who would fight and even die for what is right.

### The Priestess

Power base: **Santa Cora**

A new icon, the Priestess has arisen in the city of Santa Cora. She claims to hear The Gods of Light and speak for them. She is part oracle, part mystic, and part metaphysical engineer - she created the **The Cathedral**, an ever-expanding temple with rooms or wings for the faiths she favours.

## Neutral Icons

### The Crusader

Power base: **First Triumph**

The armoured fist of the Dark Gods. So long as others stay the hell out of his way, the Crusader turns his wrath against demons who seek to destroy the world that his masters want to rule. Follow the Crusader if you want to win at any cost.

### The Dwarf King

Power base: **Forge**

The self-styled "King of the Underworld" (gnomes, drow and other underworld dwellers would beg to differ). Always up for a rumble. Currently in a loose alliance with the Emperor against the Orcs and monsters of the north. But is that about to change?

## The Elf Queen

Power base: The **Court of Stars**

Rules the one place where High Elves, Wood Elves and Drow come together. An adept political operator. Her magical power equals the Archmage's own.

## The High Druid

Power base: **Wild Wood**

The champion of the resurgent Wild and the spiritual and magical leader of elementals and other spirits of nature that were chained by the Empire but are now working themselves free. She might be the great force that destroys the Empire, or the hero who destroys the destroyers and points to a new way to live.

## The Prince of Shadows

Power base: **Shadowport**

Part thief, part trickster, part assassin. To some they are a hero, to others a villain. They have squandered the riches of the dwarves, murdered the hopes of a dragon and plundered the dreams of a god. Their exploits have changed the world, but none can tell their ultimate goals or motives.

## Villainous Icons

### The Diabolist

Power base: **Hell Marsh**

Controls fiends and tampers with forces that even the Archmage avoids. She likes her victims screaming and her chaos pure. She claims that summoning demons prevents them from overwhelming the Great Gold Wurm, though no-one believes her. She is known for keeping destruction personal rather than universal and for occasional surprising acts of kindness.

### The Lich King

Power base: **Necropolis**

Lord of the undead, a fallen tyrant who intends to conquer the Dragon Empire and restore his ancient kingdom. He mostly understands that ruling a kingdom is not the same as destroying it.

### The Orc Lord

Power base: **Frost Range**

A figure of legend in the history of the Dragon Empire. He comes and goes from age to age, but when he appears, another icon always falls. Who will succumb to the orc hordes this time?

### The Blue Sorceress

Power base: **Drakkenhall**

A new icon, she broke the power of a triad of dragons known as **The Three** and ate the blue one's heart, acquiring its powers. An icon for sorcerers and wizards who prefer to wield their power untainted by moral scruples.

## History

To be determined! I intend to run something called the Engine of Ages, which is a collaborative history creation exercise.

### Before the First Age

**The Gods** created the **Three Realms**.

The rule of **The Wizard King**. Ended by a collaboration between the followers of **The First Empress**, the Elves and the Dwarves. It is possible that **The Orc Lord** was created as a weapon to use against him.

1st Age:

2nd Age:

3rd Age:

4th Age:

5th Age:

6th Age:

7th Age:

8th Age:

9th Age:

10th Age:

11th Age:

12th Age:

**The Three** raid the dwarven capital of **Forge**, causing enormous destruction and killing **The Dwarf King**. They are eventually defeated by **The Blue Sorceress** who captures the Black and the Red and kills the Blue, eating its heart and gaining its power. Many of Forge's treasures go missing, possibly due to **The Prince of Shadows**.

13th Age: The present day.

## Ancestries

The world of the 13th Age has people of many different ancestries living side by side.

Ancestries manifest as inherited characteristics and as cultural conventions. All people can fall in love and interbreed, regardless of their ancestry. Offspring inherit the ancestral characteristics of one or other parent rather than a blending of the two.

Some ancestries have Ancestral Icons which are particularly associated with them. You may have an **Icon Relationship** with your Ancestral Icon, not necessarily positive.

No-one knows why **The Gods** created so many ancestries, though there are many theories.

The most common ancestries in the Dragon Empire are the following.

## Humans

People of human ancestry are the most common in the Dragon Empire. They come in a variety of shapes, sizes, colours and hairiness. The majority of humans are urban and live in the major cities of the Dragon Empire.

**Ancestral Icon: The Emperor**

## Elves

People of elven ancestry tend to be on the tall side and have sharp cheekbones and pointed ears. Like humans, they come in a variety of colours, but unlike humans, there are three distinct sub-cultures characterised by where they live.

- *High Elves* are the most "elfly" and live in Elf-cities (yes, they generally believe that "Elf" should be capitalised).
- *Wood Elves* inhabit forests and magical places. They are generally shorter in stature than high elves and drow.
- *Drow* live underground and have a regimented, military culture.

**Ancestral Icon: The Elf Queen**

## Dwarves

People of dwarven ancestry tend to live in the **Underworld**. They are typically around 4-5 feet tall and have a robust attitude to life that reflects their frames. Think vikings or hells angels. Some dwarven war-bands are fond of raids on **The Land** which they call "rumbles".

**Ancestral Icon: The Dwarf King**

## Gnomes

If dwarves are free-living biker types, people of gnomish ancestry are their hippy anarcho-syndicalist cousins. Gadgets, both magical and mundane, are their thing. There is a greater premium on intelligence and inventiveness in gnome cultures than dwarven ones, though dwarves are not averse to using gnomish devices when it suits them, with or without permission.

**Ancestral Icon: The Gnome Mage**

## The Folk

People of the Folk are characterised by small stature and hairy feet. They have a distinctive culture involving round burrows, pipes and ale.

Only the most uncouth would use the derogatory term "halfling", though "little folk" is a commonly-used term that most Folk don't seem to mind. Because Folk tend to be good at hiding and moving quietly, they have been confused with sprites, fairies and goblins. "Hobbit" is a mildly racist term used by those who think that they are small hobgoblins.

Scholars call the Folk "Floresians" after Floresia, their legendary homeland. Some Folk claim that **The Gods** created them first, and that humans are Folk who were exiled from Floresia for being freakishly tall.

**Ancestral Icon:** The Folk have no ancestral icon (or do they?)

## Life in the Dragon Empire

Note: All of these are subject to change.

### Languages

The Common Tongue is spoken by most people in the Empire and is the primary language of Humans and Folk. Elves, Dwarves and Gnomes have their own languages with their own scripts. Wizards learn Arcane, a language for thinking about and writing spells, at Wizards' school.

Goblins, Kobolds, Bugbears, Hobgoblins, Orcs and Sahuagin share a language, Orkish, and Dragons speak Draconic. Strange and disturbing symbols scrawled on the walls of some Hellholes suggests that **Demons** have a shared language too.

### Names

There are no hard and fast rules for names in the Dragon Empire - some people use first name / family name (or the other way round), some name themselves after their birthplace or their ancestors, some use nicknames. Those owning close allegiance to their ancestry may follow certain ancestry-linked conventions, but many others will not.

The Empire does insist on everyone having a legally distinct name for contracts and deeds of ownership, but this is only enforced in the main cities (Axis, Horizon, Santa Cora, New Port and Glitterhaegen). An army of bureaucrats maintains the Index of Citizens, a long list of accredited names held in the main cities.

There is a loose convention that people of feminine gender use names where the last vowel is a or e, people of masculine gender use names where the last vowel is o or i, and non-binary or no gender people use names where the last vowel is u or y, but there are so many exceptions that it's not a reliable indicator.

### Government

Most settlements of any size are governed by a council headed by a mayor - the way the council members get selected varies depending on the settlement. They are responsible for a local militia that provides defence and law enforcement. They are also responsible for gathering **The Emperor's** taxes (imperial legions and magical wards have to be paid for somehow), which are charged on a per-settlement basis based on number of people and economic activity. The council can either be elected or appointed.

### Law

Justice is typically administered by magistrates who are appointed by the town council and who oversee the Watch (police). Punishments are usually fines, imprisonment or exile. Capital punishment is possible but rare, as it tends to generate blood feuds. Slavery is outlawed, though

employment contracts that are close to slavery have been known. Local towns are given considerable leeway in legal interpretations, but the Legions take a dim view of anyone messing with the magical wards or inciting rebellion against the rule of the Emperor.

## Economics and Trade

The majority of trade is between communities within the Empire, though there is trade with **Koru Behemoth** and **Red Wastes** nomads, barbarian villages living beyond the borders, and dwarven, gnomish and drow communities in the **Underworld**. Common trade goods are foodstuffs, mined materials, wood for construction or cooking and crafted domestic items. Wizards, druids and sorcerers can make good money by selling trinkets, charms and potions.

There are competing chains of banks of which the largest are the Merchant Alliance Bank, which is run from **Glitterhaegen** and which distributes the Empire's coins (see **Money**), and the Stonerock Bank, whose owners are a family of gnomes and which prides itself on its elaborate security procedures and fiscal rectitude (motto: "solid as stone"). The Delves' Bank is a dwarven rival that has lost prestige since the attack on **Forge** and the death of the previous Dwarf King.

## Culture

High end music, dance, art, sculpture and theatre all exist in the Empire but are largely confined to the major cities. Bards, troubadours and travelling players are common in the countryside and are generally welcomed (depending on how good they are). Ceilidhs are common as a form of celebration.

## Sex, Marriage and Gender

In general sex between adults is regarded as a fun activity (a few groups may think otherwise); consent is mandatory. Marriage is a public commitment to (usually) one other person for the purposes of mutual support and possibly child-rearing. It may be accompanied by a marriage contract between the partners' families if that is traditional, which will be upheld by magistrates. Marriage is assumed to be life-long, unless the partners clearly indicate otherwise.

People of all ancestries can be male, female, intersex; gender is a cultural concept. Some groups may have clothing and other conventions associated with gender, but in the areas under the Emperor's direct control, at least, these are not important.

## Who counts as a Citizen?

In the Dragon Empire, all the ancestries listed in the Ancestries entry are officially recognised as "citizens". Ancestries which are traditionally aligned with villainous icons (from **The Emperor's** point of view) such as orcs, kobolds, gnolls, goblins, hobgoblins and sahuagin, would not be considered citizens, though there are occasional exceptions. Summoned magical creatures such as elementals and the undead cannot be citizens.

Sad to say, cultural othering is not uncommon, though it is generally restricted to stereotyping for humorous effect. Not everyone may appreciate the joke, though.



## Common Beliefs

Belief in the existence of souls and an afterlife has always been common. What form the afterlife is thought to take varies considerably, and is complicated by the known existence of the undead. Most people believe that they have seen ghosts or other manifestations of the spirits of the dead.

In previous Ages, the general belief was that **The Gods** created the Three Realms and then went elsewhere, so worshipping them was a waste of time. With the advent of **The Priestess** there has been an upsurge in organised religions, but the belief systems they espouse, though usually based around "The Gods of Light", are highly varied. Followers of the Crusader have always believed that they serve "the Dark Gods" who are seen as being in opposition to the Gods of Light ("dark" as in hidden, not evil, though some would argue otherwise).

The belief that there is a consistent set of laws governing the universe is rare due to the existence of implausible magical effects, but can be found amongst certain groups.

Magic is widely believed to be alive in some manner.

Nature-loving types have a common belief in the Wild, a mystical force that empowers living things. **The High Druid** is its manifestation. Belief in nature spirits and genii loci that can affect crop growth is common in rural areas.

Demons are generally thought to originate from outside this reality and to be inherently corrupting of the natural order. The Diabolist, of course, disagrees.

## Money

### Imperial Coinage

The most common coins in use are produced by the Imperial Mint in the Palace district of Axis. Stamped with the serene visage of **The Emperor** on the obverse, they are accepted by most tradesfolk in and around the Dragon Empire, with various degrees of grumbling.

#### *Imperial (gp)*

Referred to as "Imp" for short. Made of gold, it shows the Dragon Throne on the reverse.

With one Imperial, a character can buy a good set of clothes, a dagger, or a goat. A skilled artisan can earn one Imperial a day. It is the standard unit of measure for wealth, even if the coin itself is not commonly used. When merchants discuss deals that involve goods or services worth hundreds or thousands of Imperials, the transactions don't usually involve the exchange of individual coins. Rather, it is a standard measure of value, and the actual exchange is in gold bars, letters of credit, or valuable goods.

#### *Dragon (sp)*

Also known as a "Wyrn", particularly among poorer folk. Made of silver, it shows a stylised dragon perched on the clouds of **Wyrblessed** on the reverse.

The most prevalent coin among commoners, a Dragon buys a labourer's work for half a day, a flask of lamp oil, or a night's rest in a poor inn.

#### *Penny (cp)*

Plural "pennies" or "pence". Made of copper, it shows a portrait of the Imperial Arena on the reverse.

Pennies are common among labourers and beggars. A single penny buys a loaf of bread, a candle, or a piece of chalk.

### How much does a coin weigh?

One coin is approximately 10g or 1/3 of an ounce, so 50 coins is 500g or 1lb.

### Exchange rates

Officially:

- One Imperial equals 10 Dragons.
- One Dragon equals 10 Pennies.

Unofficially, exchanging coins from one value to another is a lucrative business for moneychangers and traders. If you want to change an Imperial, expect to get 8 or 9 Dragons back.

### Other Coinages

#### *Elven Leaves*

Elf communities in **Queen's Wood** and drow communities in the **Underworld** use delicately crafted leaf-shaped gold, silver or copper foil notes with magical reinforcements to make them more robust and heat-resistant than you would expect. They are also popular with rich merchants as they are light and easy to carry around. However they are rare because of the time and effort involved in making them. Outside Elven areas, a leaf can usually be exchanged for ten times its imperial equivalent at a merchant's.

#### *Dwarven Gemstones and Nails*

A Dwarven gemstone is a small elaborately-carved pebble into which tiny rubies, emeralds or sapphires have been embedded in an abstract pattern representing the hold in which it was made. Dwarves use them for higher value transactions equivalent to 2-3 Imperials. Lower value goods are exchanged by barter, though ordinary brass or steel nails have become a medium for balancing out perceived differences in value, causing them to become, in effect, an additional currency.

Dwarven gemstones are inherently valuable in the cities of the Dragon Empire for their aesthetics, but Dwarves generally take a very dim view of people using them as anything other than a means of exchange.

## Reckoning Time

### Days

The **Three Realms** have a sun and a moon that are much smaller and closer than their earth equivalents. The moon has phases that repeat every 30 days or so, though it varies somewhat. Fortunately, passage of the sun is one of the few reliably regular phenomena in the Three Realms and the usual 24 hour clock is in use.

Nights and days are of roughly equal length. The proportion of night to day varies over a 12 moon cycle, particularly at the northern and southern edges of the Land.

### Seasons and Years

The Land has periods of warm and cold that repeat over a 12 moon cycle, but given the effect of the swirling magical energies of the **Overworld** on the weather, it can be difficult to tell when they

begin and end. Height also has a significant impact, with mountainous areas having more extreme and sometimes contradictory weather than the lowlands.

## Ages

Most people would agree that there have been twelve Ages prior to the current one. Ages are delimited by world-spanning catastrophic events associated with the fall of one or more **Icons** and the rise of other ones. Lack of a precise calendar means that historians of previous Ages have focused on the order of events rather than their precise lengths, but it is safe to assume that each lasted several human generations.

It is generally agreed that the current Age started around three human generations (40-50 years) ago.

## Calendars

### *The Imperial Almanac*

This is the most frequently used calendar in the Three Realms. Each season is divided into 9 weeks of 10 days, with one or two "inset days" between each that are traditionally feast days. Days are named after their ordinal position in the week, for example Firstday of the 3rd Week of Spring, or Ninthday of the 8th Week of Autumn. The year starts on Longest Night, followed by Hangover Day, followed by Firstday of the 1st week of Winter. The other inset days are Plough Day (between winter and spring), Shortest Night (between spring and summer) and Harvest Day (between summer and autumn). Occasionally the Heavengazers of the **School of Imperial Wizardry** add an additional inset day to the year when they determine (through mysterious means) that Longest Night or Shortest Night has drifted. This usually comes after Shortest Night.

Years are numbered since the start of the current Age. So a full date would be something like Fourthday of the 6th Week of Spring, Year 43 of the 13th Age.

### *The Old Calendar*

Not everyone follows the Imperial Almanac, even within the Dragon Empire itself. Some farmers, for example, claim to get better yields by following the Old Calendar, which is based on the cycles of the moon. Where the Old Calendar came from is unclear - some month names are of Elven origin, and at least one is Draconic - but druids were probably involved.

The months are of the Old Calendar are as follows:

Winter	Spring	Summer	Autumn
Icehowl	Budbranch	Sunreach	Tallcrown
Tombfrost	Meadowbreeze	Farwalk	Thickfort
Sidegloom	Bloodmoon	Goldscale	Nightcreep

Days are numbered from the dark of the moon, e.g. Thickfort Day 20. There are no weekdays.

### *High Elven Calendar*

The High Elves have a complicated calendar based on 4 cycles: the Cycle of the Sun, the Cycle of the Moon, the Cycle of the Stars and the Cycle of the Seasons. Significant milestones in each cycle have their own names and are combined to identify the current time.

### *Underworld Calendar*

The Underworld Calendar is (of course) a Dwarven invention. Months and years are reckoned from sunbeams entering through cracks hitting carefully placed rocks in a location at the top of Forge known as the Chamber of the Sun. Time is divided into "Shifts" rather than days or hours.

## Oddities

Some unusual features of the Three Realms.

### Koru Behemoths

The koru behemoths are a widely scattered group of a dozen or so enormous creatures from the dawn of the world. They are highly varied in appearance, but imagine an eight-legged elephant crossed with a turtle the size of a small island, and you will get the general idea.

The koru behemoths migrate in a counter-clockwise circle that follows the southern, eastern and northern peripheries of the Dragon Empire before branching off into the Frost Range and returning through the southern Giantwalk. They cross the entrance to the **Midland Sea** at the **Koru Straits**, swimming through the water before hauling themselves up on the northern shore.

The behemoths have never been seen to eat, so it is not clear what their energy source is. The most popular theory is that they graze on springs of primal energy that are only visible to them. These deplete and regenerate with time, hence their constant need to move on.

It is possible to ride or even live on the back of a koru behemoth, and most of them do not seem to mind, provided that annoying use of arcane or divine magic is kept to a minimum. Permanent residents are usually smart enough to clean and protect the behemoth from pests, and use friendship rituals to encourage the opening of airy cavern homes in the behemoth's carapace (which is almost impervious to forced excavation).

### Hellholes

Hellholes are village- or town-sized areas that have been transformed into literal hells on earth. At night their orange and sickly purple glow can be seen from miles around.

Hellholes are full of **Demons**. Most of them are more or less trapped within. A few may escape briefly but can be sucked back into their hellhole prison if they remain nearby, so surrounding areas may suffer from indirect curses but generally not from outright demonic attack.

It is not clear what causes hellholes. Many blame **The Diabolist**, claiming that she is either deliberately creating them or that they are a consequence of demonic power partially escaping her control. Certainly she has a relationship with them; as well as a hellhole in **Hell Marsh** being her base, **The Archmage** and **The Priestess** say they she can move between hellholes without crossing the intervening space. Another theory is that hellholes are a type of **Living Dungeon**. Still another is that they are a consequence of weaknesses in reality caused by the activities of the **The Archmage**.

Hellholes seldom have a single ruler. Most have competing groups of demons fighting bizarre turf wars. It has been known for demons to recruit adventurers to turn the tide of their internal battles. Their inherent disorganisation probably explains **The Crusader's** success in conquering them.

The geography of hellholes is as varied as their inhabitants, with convoluted and constantly changing architecture. Getting into a hellhole is generally easy - being unable to leave themselves, demons are keen to lure potential victims to them. Getting out again is a different matter.

## Living Dungeons

Living Dungeons are collections of monster-infested caves or buildings that move as a unit. They bubble up from deep in the **Underworld**, propelled by rising magical energies. If they break through to the surface, the monsters in them can escape, bringing chaos to the surrounding region. The original purpose of the **Adventurers' Guild** was to monitor and contain such threats. Some particularly energetic living dungeons have budded off from the earth altogether and have risen into the heavens to form new realms in the **Overworld**.

Living Dungeons can emerge almost anywhere, but certain places, such as **Omen**, seem to be particular hotspots.

There has been much speculation about the origins of Living Dungeons. Their apparently designed nature suggests that an Intelligence is creating them, perhaps a trapped god or particularly powerful demon.

## Demons

Demons is a catch-all term for any being from outside the **Three Realms** that isn't one of **The Gods**. Most have a monstrous appearance to human eyes and have strange magical powers that are of great interest to the more dubious sorts of wizards and sorcerers, not to mention **The Diabolist**. The rituals of these individuals, along with **Hellholes** and **The Abyss**, are the chief sources of demonic manifestations.

Most demons are of animal intelligence or below. Their motivations vary, but it is safe to assume that the majority are not happy existing in the **Three Realms** and would return to their home realms if they could. Of course, some take delight in conquering and enslaving non-demons, while others are unthinking servants of bigger or more intelligent demonic masters.

Demons with person-level intelligence and self-awareness coincidentally often have (or choose to adopt) more humanoid forms. They are known as devils.

## Adventuring and the Adventurers' Guild

As a player character, you are an Adventurer.

Adventurers come in all shapes and sizes, but one thing they all have in common is a willingness to risk life and limb in dangerous environments. The reasons why they do this are many and varied. Some do it for the thrill of combat. Others value the gold, jewels or magical items that can be found in ancient ruins and tombs. Still others do it to protect and serve their fellows, or to follow their personal god. And some do it to show off or exercise their magical or physical talents.

Whatever their personal motivations, most adventurers - those that survive, anyway - prefer to work in teams. Finding a group of like-minded companions can be a challenge, but fortunately an organisation exists to help that come about. This is the Adventurers' Guild, a venerable institution allied with (but not run by) the **Dragon Empire**. It has branches in all the major cities and outposts elsewhere. Its ostensible purpose is to coordinate teams of adventurers to clear out the denizens

of **Living Dungeons** which would otherwise overwhelm the Empire, but over the ages its range of activities has increased to include anything for which a bunch of toughs with magic, muscle and (occasionally) brains might be useful. However, combating existential threats to established communities is still its primary *raison d'etre*.

The Guild (motto: "For the good of all") is neutral with regard to ancestry, profession or Icon affiliation (at least nominally). There is a guild leader in each city who is voted in for a term of five years by a secret ballot of local guild members. The guild master accepts assignments and forms parties of three to six people to deal with them. Parties need a variety of skills and so tend to be of mixed professions. Successful parties are encouraged to stick together.

Members are expected to pay one tenth of their income to the Guild. In return they receive training, legal and healing services, plus a pin that significantly reduces the chances of harrassment by the imperial legions when engaging in acts likely to be seen as a breach of the peace by local residents. The larger guild halls have barracks-like sleeping accommodation.

Adventurers being the independently-minded lot that they are, freelance missions are common and expected. It is generally considered good manners to check in with the local guild leader first in case of they have already been made aware of and are taking steps against the threat.