

CHAPTER ONE

Shaintar Omnibus

Every great tale has a beginning, and yours begins here, in the realm that is Shaintar. At once familiar and alien, you will come to know Shaintar as a place you understand completely, while still perplexed and dazzled by its mysteries. As you seek out the answers to those mysteries, all the while doing battle with villains and monsters both archetypal and alien, you will come to understand a primal truth –

Shaintar, a world with thousands of years of history behind it, stands on the brink of dramatic, possibly catastrophic change. How this change ultimately manifests, what damage it will wreak, or what growth it will engender, will depend entirely upon... *you*.

OF THE LAND

Shaintar (pronounced “Shine-tar”). The very name speaks of the unique and powerful mythology that defines this world. It is a world of ancient mystery and contemporary intrigue. A world of endless possibilities, both wondrous and sinister. Magic abounds and is a powerful force; yet even magic knows limitations, and a lone hero with a strong blade and a stronger heart may prevail. Shaintar is a world of adventure, a world meant for heroes...

Shaintar is comprised of one primary continent, with around a dozen islands located mainly to the south. Anything beyond a few dozen miles off the coast in any direction is virtually unexplored, as is the land beyond the Everwall Mountains to the north. It is generally accepted in scholarly circles that Shaintar is a spherical world, but no expeditions have successfully proven this fact.

The climate is generally temperate with four seasons; Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter. The northern regions are cooler and prone to harsh winters. The south is warmer, tending towards high humidity. The western

regions tend to be more arid than the east.

There is one sun, and the days are approximately 25 hours long. The “Thirteenth Hour” of the night often has mystical or superstitious importance. Each year consists of sixteen months of 33 days each, except the first month of the calendar year, which has been given 34 days to maintain proper balance. That day is often treated as a “free day” in many cultures, meant only for festivals or rest. The most common calendars recognize six day weeks, with the sixth day normally being reserved for worship, contemplation, or rest.

The months are as follows: Falling Ice, First Hunt, Golden Eagle, Planting Moons (the spring months), Red Wolf, Eternal Sun, Thunder Hawk, Festival Moons (the summer months), Dancing Clouds, Forest Dance, Raining Leaves, Harvest Moons (the autumn months), White Stag, Grey Winds, White River, and Dark Moons (the winter months). These names are in common usage in the Kingdom of Galea, the Prelacy of Camon, and the Elvish Nation. The days of the week have various names depending on where one lives. For example, the sixth day of the week is called

Rest Day in Galea, Holy Day in Camon, and Jin'tola Hanais in the Elvish Nation (which means "Day of Reflection").

There are three moons that rule the night sky of Shaintar: Unidar, Diadar, and Lianar. Unidar reaches fullness every month, Diadar every two months, and Lianar every four. The three moons share the same fullness cycle; thus they are all three full every four months, and this is often a time of mystical import. Unidar is brightly silver in the sky, Diadar is bluish in coloring, and Lianar is a very pale grey. As might be expected, the three moons can often cause the seas to be quite violent, which is part of the reason that exploration much farther beyond the main continent is almost impossible (though the Mists of the Veil have much more to do with it, by far...)

The main continent is over 1800 miles long north to south and an equal distance wide at its widest point; although this isn't that large compared to, say, North America, it is a tremendous distance to the Medieval-era traveller.

OF THE GODS

According to Elvish legends, which are the basis for many other cultural belief systems, the world was created by the entities Shanais and Targon. Targon is often referred to as the Lord of the Land, and Shanais is called the Spirit Mother. It is held that they created the world and then brought forth the Ascended to watch over their creation as they moved on throughout the cosmos to create other worlds.

The Ascended are not actually gods, but spirit guides and guardians over Corelisia,

DIFFERENT, BUT SIMILAR

It's fun to make a land that is different than the real world, but it's important when you are creating a world that people are meant to inhabit and play in that it remain a place they can relate to in some way.

The basic climates of Shaintar are meant to be pretty recognizable, as are the land areas and the cultures. The cultures mostly evoke European types, while the climates are meant to combine North American and mainly Western European norms.

The actual land mass is approximately the size of Western Europe, with a little of the Eastern areas added to fill it out. This gives a lot of area to travel without becoming insane to manage.

As for the calendar, hours in a day, and the moons, this is probably the greatest departure. Frankly, I did it mainly out of pure inspiration at first, but have since built some fun mythology and other ideas out of it. The three moons do have some mystical importance, and their conjunctions are constant sources of "times of portent." Playing with their impact on sea travel has helped explain why distant shores are so much harder to reach, as well. The calendar was mostly just a fun conceit, but it has come to mean that everyone just lives a great deal longer.

As for the 25 hour days... I just love the idea of a "13th Hour." Another mystical time, set apart from everything else. For me, it was like the idea of midnight lasting for an entire hour, and it is a fun thing to mess around with when you have the gothic forces of Darkness in the mix.

the World Between Worlds that is the realm of spirits. In the cultures that acknowledge them, it is intrinsic in their beliefs that there are no "all-powerful" gods ruling over them, but spirit beings that can provide guidance and even some aid, and that these spirits protect them from the ravages of the Abyss and the

Nether, the regions of Corelisia that are home to Demons and Necrolords.

There were originally five Ascended: Vainar, Ceynara, Dranak, Illiana, and Zavonis. Vainar was raised from the Fae people to be the leader of the Ascended, and his realm was that of Life. As the Soulfinder, he and those who served him were to oversee Corelisia as a whole and guide the spirits of those who died to their places. But Vainar was tempted by the Necrolords, offered power if he would but open the way for their access to Shaintar and the region of Corelisia that surrounds it. The Necrolords are mysterious and dark denizens of the Nether, a place of great evil. They draw their power from Darkness and corrupt the Spirit realm wherever they gain access to it.

Vainar sought to control the Necrolords, believing that if he could accept their power and somehow control it, he could gain control of them and restrict their depredations. He soon discovered the folly of his actions as the power they gave him corrupted his very soul. He now rules over the Necrolords (as he sought to do), but he continues the very destruction and evil he sought to defeat. He is now known as Vainar the Fallen, the Shadowlord.

Ceynara was raised from the Humans and set to guard over the gate to the Abyss. Spirits of fallen warriors were often sent to her to aid her battle to fight off the Demons so that they could not ravage Corelisia and gain access to Shaintar. But Ceynara was seduced by Uldor, one of the great Demon Lords. He offered her the throne as Queen over all the Abyss, and she accepted. Ceynara is now known as the Demon Queen, and Uldor is her Prince Consort.

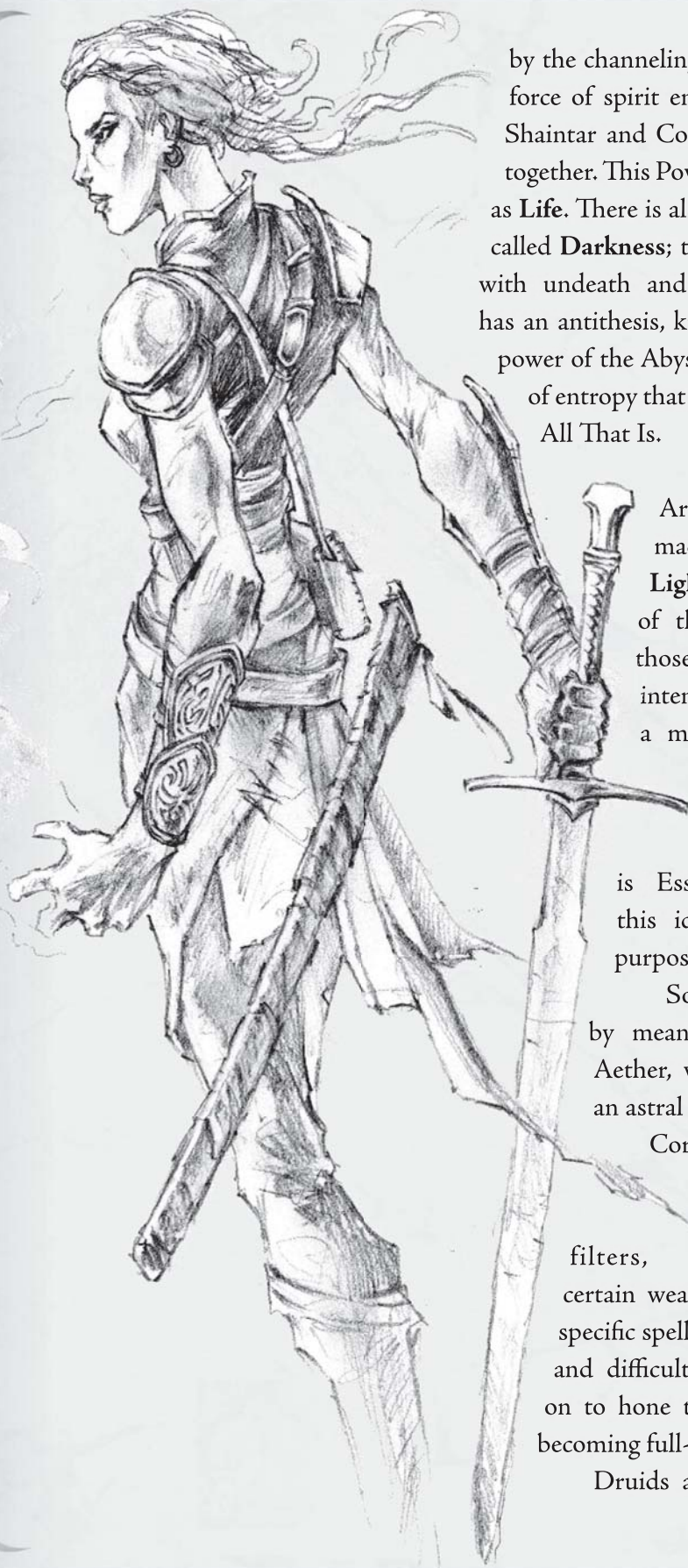
Dranak was raised from the Dwarves to become Stonewalker, and the earth and all its treasures became his realm. Illiana, raised from the Dregordians, became Waverider, mistress of the Seas and life-giving water. From the Aevakar, Zavonis was raised to become Windmaster, lord of the skies. The three of them worked to raise up Vainar's sister, Landra, to take on the mantle of Soulfinder. Unfortunately, the doing of this greatly drained their power, and combined with the corruption already present in Corelisia, they are now barely strong enough to withstand the combined might of the Demons and the Necrolords.

In more recent times, however (during what is now known as the "Betrayal War"), another higher being made its presence known. An entity calling itself Archanon (the same name as the "god" worshipped by the Church of Archanon) began to grant powers to some priests and paladins. This same entity overtly denounced the Church of the Prelacy of Camon, and caused a new church to be formed – the Church of Light. So far, Archanon has proven a strong and noble ally to the remaining Ascended.

There are many lesser spirit beings in Corelisia, most of which serve one of the Ascended. However, there are many who do not, and many mysteries of Corelisia are yet to be discovered.

OF MAGIC

Magic is very much a part of the world of Shaintar, and it comes in varying forms. Four primary Powers influence matters spiritual and arcane in this world, and magic is created



by the channeling and usage of Essence, the force of spirit energy that permeates all of Shaintar and Corelisia and binds all things together. This Power is most often referred to as **Life**. There is also corrupted Essence, often called **Darkness**; this is the Power associated with undeath and corruption. Essence also has an antithesis, known as **Flame**; this is the power of the Abyss, the raw destructive force of entropy that threatens the foundation of All That Is.

With the appearance of Archanon, a fourth Power made itself known – that of **Light**. Light is a representation of the “higher law” to which those of benevolent and judicious intent aspire, and it seems to be a manifestation of the desire for order, law, justice, and guardianship by most sentient beings. Light is Essence channeled through this idea and focused to such purposes.

Sorcerers manipulate Essence by means of what they call the Aether, which is best described as an astral layer between Shaintar and Corelisia. Through the Aether, they draw forth Essence through calculated filters, and then structure certain weavings of that Essence into specific spells. Their craft is very precise and difficult. Ultimately they may go on to hone their craft more efficiently, becoming full-fledged Mages.

Druids are living conduits for the

power of the Ascended - they are the vessels of Life. They serve the Ascended, but not as worshippers; they are better viewed as loyal representatives, or even partners in a fashion. The Ascended provide access to Corelisia to wield power and summon spirits, and in return the Druids promote the tenets of the Ascended. Druids are chosen by the Ascended, and they often must go on special journeys to seek their final destiny. Once someone takes on the mantle of Druid, they are said to walk the Paths.

Adepts are practitioners of the Way, and they specialize in manipulating the flows of Essence from their own spirits. Theirs are the powers of the mind and the body; telepathy, illusion, and physical enhancement are all within their grasp with the power of mind over matter they may exert. Adepts most often seek the ways of peace, for peace brings a unity of mind, body, and spirit, which is the desired state for an adept. However, there are those who are corrupted while following the Way, and they wield terrible power.

GM to GM

THE MYSTERY OF ARCMANCY

Although it has been mentioned in some materials found on the Web, you won't find much of anything about arcfire and arcmanancy in this book. It's something that comes up in later material, down the road, as part of the grander storyline started here.

Necromancers are those who have opened themselves to the magic of the Necrolords, forever damning their souls but gaining them great power. Through the conduits provided by the Necrolords and opened into Shaintar by Vainar, they can tap into the raw, corrupted

Essence of the Nether, wielding the powers of Darkness. Many necromancers will attempt to extend their unnaturally shortened lives by converting themselves into liches or mummies, or else they will seek out vampires to embrace them.

Acolytes are those vile and evil practitioners who serve the Demons of the Abyss. They have given themselves over to the Flame and thus represent destruction and chaos. Acolyte magic comes off as a strange and terrible mixing of sorcery and divine channeling, called Thaumaturgy. Fiery and destructive magics, as well as the summoning of Demons, are the stock-in-trade of Acolytes.

Priests and Paladins of the Church of Light channel the Light, a force given unto them by the Lord of Light, Archanon. They must adhere to the codes and expectations of their faith, or they will find that their invocations will not work. The Light is a pure form of power, drawing on both the external forces that Archanon bestows and the inner strength of faith of the Invoker.

Finally, there are the alchemists, those who study the magics inherent in many things found in the world, and who know how to unlock these mystical properties through procedure and ritual. Their efforts manifest in potions, salves, and "bottles of explosive consequences," and what they lack in pure eldritch power they more than make up for in the ability to share what they create with others.

OF THE PEOPLE

The northwest and north-central portion of the main continent is dominated

by the human-founded **Kal-A-Nar Empire**, a very violent and tyrannical land ruled by Warlords who worship Ceynara as their "Goddess of War." In the Northeast, the pale and mysterious *shayakar* ("Shadow Fae"), along with vampire lords and other undead powers, rule over **Shaya'Nor**. Goblinesh Gathers (a fractured collection of goblin, orc, and ogre clans; their only common ground is mutual defense against the Empire and other threats) are scattered throughout the world, but they are prevalent mostly in the north. On the central west coast of Shaintar's main continent lies **Dregordia**, an area ruled by the reptilian species known by the name of their homeland, dregordians. East of Dregordia lies what was once the southwestern portion of the Empire, the **Eternal Desert**; it is now under contention as the original rulers of the Desert, the humans known as the *Youlin Aradi*, struggle with each other over control. Continuing eastward across the central portion of Shaintar, there is the **Prelacy of Camon**, another human-based nation that is run by the Church of Archanon; the Prelacy practices genocide against the Fae and anyone who uses any form of actual magic, and they seek to make humans (mainly, their "faithful") the only race in Shaintar. In the mountain ranges just west and south of the Prelacy lies the proud and warrior-led kingdom of Olara, whose human and dwarven people have stood against the invasion forces of the Empire and Shaya'Nor time and time again.

Spanning across most of the southern portion of Shaintar are the Southern Kingdoms, primary among them being the Kingdom of **Galea**. Within this area (also called The Wildlands) lies the center of the

Fae Nation (in the forest lands of *Landra' Feya*), although the Fae people span across the world. The Wildlands are also home to the **Malakar Dominion**, a federation of petty tyrants, bandit kings, and criminal overlords that constantly war with their neighbors for control of the Southern Kingdoms. Just south of Galea are the city-states of **Mindoth's Tower** (a Druidic enclave) and **Archanaya** (the home of the "Reformed" Church of Archanon, now called the Church of Light, a branch that has broken with the Prelacy). The southernmost peninsula of Shaintar is the home of the **Freelands**, an area dedicated to ruling itself without nobility, feudalism or despotism. Scattered throughout the Southern Kingdoms are dozens of **Dwarvish Clanhomes**, mostly nestled in or around the various mountain and hill regions.

Off the southwest coast of the continent, there is the island nation of **Korindia**, populated by a mysterious people said to be descended from the mixed breed children of humans and Fae from a time when a terrible plague almost destroyed the latter race. Far to the southeast lie the **Pirate Archipelagoes**, a collection of islands ruled by bandit kings and pirate princes. Even farther away, south and far west of Shaintar, lies the island nation of **Nazatir**, home to a sea-borne and sea-bred branch of humanity known for sailing skills and (sadly, since most Nazatirans are peaceful and friendly) piracy.

Scattered across the continent are tribes of Aevakar (winged folk, extremely rare) and Brinchie (a nomadic felinoid species).

OF HISTORY

In the lands of Shaintar, myth and history are intertwined beyond separation. The great conflicts that have defined the eras of the realm have always been rooted in the primal disparities of the Powers that influence Shaintar – Life, Darkness, Flame and (eventually) Light. Politics and religion are melded into one force, as the Ascended and other greater beings either subtly suggest or overtly exert their will and wishes on their followers.

In ancient times, the influence of the Ascended and the other Greater Beings was so potent and destructive, their conflicts resulted in cataclysmic wars that set back entire civilizations. Only upon the raising of Landra to replace her fallen brother did this cycle of devastation end, for she used her power and position to enact the Covenants. These mystic seals greatly reduced the direct power and influence beings not native to physical realm could have on Shaintar, invoking a countering price for each

transgression. As such, each Power's advocates had to engage in far more subtle efforts to enact their agendas in the realm of Shaintar, relying on those that honor and serve them to accomplish their goals.

The Kal-a-Nar Empire has striven, time and again, to expand its control farther south, all in the name of Ceynara. The powers that rule Shaya'Nor have always preferred more subtle machinations, orchestrating events and agendas in the shadows of cities and towns across Shaintar. The Prelacy of Camon, ruled solely by the offices of the Church of Archanon since 2835, seeks nothing less than the complete domination of their faith over all the lands of the realm (or so everyone is led to believe). The Malakar Dominion continues to press eastward, trying to reclaim territories lost when Vol Al'Daya founded the Kingdom of Galea in 2405, though most of their successes lie in their shadowy criminal efforts, mostly within the cities of the coasts.

On the front line of each Imperial incursion, Goblinesh uprising, and foray from Shaya'Nor and Prelacy forces, the stalwart Kingdom of Olara has stood as the beaten, battered, but never broken wall. Landra'Feya, Galea, and the Freeland have always responded to the greater incursions by sending their own armies to stand with the Olarans.

In the
times



between wars, each nation (and the countless smaller kingdoms, duchies, and city states that lie within the realm known simply as the “Wild Lands”) has provided troops and resources to the organization known as *Grayson’s Grey Rangers*. The Rangers have always stood in the Southern Kingdoms to protect the common folk against monsters, bandits, and despots. In the last century, their mission has grown to include acting as a supporting force against incursions from the northern aggressor states, shifting their focus away from acting as peacekeepers and sheriffs and more towards military action.

The last century, however, has been amazingly peaceful. This is mainly due to the unparalleled victory the forces of Light and Life experienced at the end of what is now known as the **Betrayal War**.

Powerful forces waged a terrible war in the physical realm of Shaintar, threatening to tear asunder the very Covenants that Landra had imposed, thanks mainly to a spiritual “loophole” that Vainar and Ceynara combined efforts to exploit. This historic unification of powers and intentions on the parts of Flame and Darkness nearly spelled the end for the forces of Life until the coming of the Light turned the tide. An actual being calling itself Archanon came forth, empowering new followers and those who rejected the hatred of the Church of the Prelacy with powers of Light and faith.

Even with this turn of events, the evil ones might well have won the day had their own treacherous natures not ultimately gotten the better of them. Making a play for ultimate power, Vainar betrayed Ceynara and attempted to gain the might of the Dragon Gate for

himself. Ceynara’s rage was such that, in the final battle at the mouth of the Gate itself, she tore asunder the Veil and cast forth the very essence of her rage into Vainar’s avatar form.

Shoving him through the Gate and into the very Void he sought to unleash upon Shaintar in his final madness, she then fell into a deep torpor as the very Gates of Hell slammed shut. Such was the price of the Covenants, resilient and unyielding in the aftermath of the battle.

All of this happened in the year 3021.

OF NOW

The Abyss has been closed off from Shaintar for a century, while the form of Vainar has been lost in the Void and the rest of the Necrolords have fallen in on themselves in disarray. The lands have known a peace and prosperity unlike any time in the last millennia.

Even so, the Druidic Council of Mindoth’s Tower has been highly active in recent years, gathering intelligence and forces in preparation for Ceynara’s return to power. Their people range throughout the continent and the islands, looking for any sign of activity from those who serve Darkness and Flame. They have already come across rumors indicating that Vainar has somehow been retrieved from the Void and resides deep in the heart of Shaya’Nor, healing in his avatar form.

Representatives from many lands of Shaintar – Galea, Olara, Landra’Feya, the Freelands, Korindia, Dregordia, and Nazatir, to name the majority – have been gathering in Mindoth’s Tower to meet with the Druid’s newly-formed Centenium Council. The tone

of these meetings has changed dramatically in the last year. No longer a gathering of information and ideas and long-range plans, the Centenium Council has become a war council.

It is the year 3121. They have little choice.

The Gates of Hell are about to open again...

