

## **BETA DISCLAIMER:**

This packet is currently in a pre-release/beta state and may have some details changed between now and final release. We will strive to only add to the information, rather than dramatically change or remove anything, but anyone building ideas off of this packet should absolutely double-check details before their first game, or communicate with staff closer to the first game.

Customs and holidays will be filled out at a later time, based on other factors being developed for the game world.

# Central Mountains

AWY Local Culture Packet v2.00 (Last edited 4/2021)

“They’re up there again.”

Stopping what he was doing, Marilnne looked up and around the shear walls of the mountain pass where they were working. The natural path through the mountains had been widened and strengthened to prevent anything from being able to collapse the walls without months of very obvious work. Watchtowers every so often ensured that if someone did try to attack those in the area where Marilnne and his coworkers stood would find themselves seen long before they could.

Despite all the company’s efforts to secure the walls, a dozen faint shapes could be seen up on the wall, watching silently. Their lack of any indication they intended to attack had likely played a part in why there was no horn-cry from the towers. If they announced every group of savages watching their work, there would be horns all day, every day.

“Ignore them,” he told his working partners, as he went back to adjusting the flow of water from the freshly-installed pipe, which drew from an aqueduct system within the walls. That creation had been his grandmother’s design, ensuring that his family would be working on water-movement within the pass for as long as they wished. “I want fresh water at the outpost by nightfall. The empire’s paying extra if it’s done today, so it’s getting done today.”

They resumed their work, moving steadily down the line until they reached a section of pipe that simply felt “off”, though he could not put words to it at first. A careful examination soon revealed that someone had misthreaded one of the fittings--a careless mistake that would get someone’s entire family fired, and very unlikely to have happened within his team.

“Uril, Osso, check on where the savages are, right now,” he announced, even as he got out a few tools from his satchel to dismantle the pipe.

“I can’t see them,” Osso replied, sounding a little worried.

“We’re in a blind spot from the tower!” Uril added.

“I know,” Marilnne told her. “That’s why I want to know what they’re up to.”

“Sir,” Uril said a moment later. “Sir!”

Marilnne sighed and set down his tools. “They’re here, aren’t they?”

When he got no answer, Marilnne raised his hands and turned around. This happened often enough that it had become routine, even if it was infuriating.

A group of shabbily-dressed orcs and ogres had closed in on his workers, trapping them against a small indent in the stone walls, where the pipes were accessible. Anywhere else...literally anywhere...the towers would have been able to see what was happening. Thankfully, no one had drawn weapons and one of the ogres marched toward Marilnne.

“What are you doing now, city-folk?” demanded the large creature, eyeing the pipes set into the stone walls. “More defilement of our lands?”

“If by defilement, you mean moving water to keep our people from drying out...yes,” Marilnne answered firmly. “You know you aren’t welcome here, unless you pay for an escort through the pass.”

The ogre snorted and walked up to him, nearly bumping chests. “My people were here long before yours.”

“And yet, still not turning a profit. Whose fault is that?”

Baring its tusks angrily, the ogre motioned vaguely to the pipes. “How many more times must we warn you not to steal from the mountains?”

“A whole lot more,” Marilnne replied curtly, despite the fear he could see in his team. “The damage to the pipe...yours?”

“Aye, that was a warning from mine,” answered the ogre, squinting up and down the road. It apparently knew that the patrols would be by any minute. “The animals starve, and my people will soon, too. There is no more water near here. You have taken it all.”

Reaching back, Marilnne tapped the pipe. “We’re happy to share, for a price.”

The ogre grunted and motioned to several of the other savages, who fanned out, as though preparing for the patrol to arrive. “Keep taking from the land and eventually, it will take back.”

“Yeah, yeah. I’ve heard that saying from your people almost every visit. Still waiting.”

“Wait no more then,” the ogre answered, gesturing vaguely toward the pipe. “While we speak, your pipes of iron are being destroyed at their source.”

Marilnne felt his skin go cold. “You wouldn’t.”

A distant horn echoed down the valley, causing the ogre to grin broadly.

“I did not do it. I was here with you. When you are ready to treat us as equals, sharing in the land’s bountie, you can send messengers. We will negotiate fairly, unlike your people.”

Without another word, the ogres and orcs gathered up and walked away, likely to wherever their lines hung from the upper walls.

“What do we do now, boss?” asked Osso, as soon as the savages were far enough away to not overheard.

Turning, Marilnne tapped the pipe with a wrench and heard the empty sound inside. They were not lying. “Now, we redirect from the reservoirs into this line, so the empire thinks we finished the project on time for our bonuses. Tomorrow, we start fixing the damage and find a way to hide the pipes to the springs from our friends. We’ve got a lot of work ahead of us. Let’s get moving. Those pipes aren’t going to fix themselves!”

### Culture Basics

The central mountain range consists of two distinct cultures, isolated from each other and from the rest of the land by the steep cliffs and jagged peaks.

Older of the two cultures are the mountain people, spread over the entire range. These people have lived there for generations, and when pressed by newcomers, tend to disappear into the most remote regions until the threat has passed. They are isolationist and have resisted even the armies of the empire that surrounds the mountains from controlling them. They are believed to be nomadic hunters, with no appreciable civilization, though they have existed in the area since the Old Kingdom.

Far newer to the region, a large team of industrious people spent generations with their families in the mountains, clearing the pass and restoring an abandoned structure there. Long ago, they found the pass that the Old Kingdom used to be inadequate for the management of supplies or troops in large numbers...and was all too easily raided by both the mountain-folk and other nasties of the region. Thus, these people have spent generations rebuilding and improving upon the fortified pass between the east and west sections of the lands, which they now lease to the empire. Originating elsewhere, the extended families have been working together for so long that their members no longer resemble the various cultures they came from. They still remain in the fortress, or one of several small villages within the pass, keeping an eye on their investments, lest the empire "forget" to pay any of the myriad terms of the agreement. To help enforce this, these people have fostered legends of having secret routes through the fortress that have yet to be discovered by the empire.

### Costume Ideas

*Central Company:* The Central Company--or Company for short--are the workers, the families, and the employees of the group that discovered the partially-collapsed pass and its fortress, rebuilding it over the course of generations. They are highly-civilized, but also very focused on ensuring the legacy of their "product". Most members of the Company will have the look of craftsmen or workers, even now that their people have stepped down from the day-to-day management of the pass. This can be interpreted many ways, but ultimately, a Company descendant should always appear ready to work in whatever field they specialize. A Company person appearing relaxed or enjoying luxury is someone who is not ready to work and may face good-natured shaming from their fellows.

*Mountain-folk:* Having done little more than trade with people on either side of the mountain range for generations, most goods the mountain-folk use tend to be self-crafted or cobbled from items intended for other

purposes. Rough patching should be very common on mountain-folk clothing and armor, and all of their gear should have a very weathered and "well-used" look to it. The people themselves are no exception, often weathered and as hardened as though they had been carved from the stone of the mountains themselves..

### Roleplaying Tips

Please remember that local culture behavior cannot override the national race packets. Trying to use local culture to ignore game rules regarding a race is cheating.

*Central Company:* Those from the Central Company are fairly civilized folks who have been out of touch with most of the outside world for a bit too long. The closest approximation would be if someone took a job in a remote area and then kept extending their stay for years on end. This is, essentially, what the Company people have done, extending their work in the pass for generations, though they have gone outside for supplies regularly...if they have to.

At their core, Company employees have been trained for generations to accomplish one goal that was believed impossible: Restore and secure a pass in impassable mountains. That done, their descendants have profited within the empire for their accomplishment. Now, the drive to find new goals and challenges is hard-wired into them. The tougher the goal, the better. Given that their ancestors built something they were told was impossible, the Company members are taught from childhood that something impossible merely requires more effort than the "possible."

*Mountain-folk:* While there are many similarities in appearance between mountain-folk and the Remnants farther west, the cultures are dramatically different.

When playing a mountain-folk, there should be a sense of having had little contact with people other than your own for most of your life. Mountain-folk tend to keep to their small packs, with little understanding of the outside world and often confusion or fear of things outside their understanding and experience. They are definitely not weak, but they are often lost when away from the mountains or confused by the outside world.

Key to playing a mountain-folk is the "fish out of water" mentality of the people from a rustic culture having walked out of the mountains into a world that is far more complicated than they knew. Politics, cultural norms outside their own, and most forms of laws other than "help your people survive" are fairly alien to the mountain-folk.

### History of the Region

Before the current empire, came the Old Kingdom, with its rapidly-moving armies, trying to hold control by force. These troop movements were difficult, owing to the need to stage armies on both sides of the mountains, or risk losing control over various areas. The mountain pass connecting the two sides of the continent was never ideal for large wagons or groups, allowing both enemies of the kingdom and the wild residents of the mountains to raid caravans far too easily.

At some point during the Old Kingdom--likely one to two centuries before the end of the Kingdom--a royal order to fortify the pass came down from on high. To meet the king's demands, those in charge of the project deployed thousands of slaves, captured in various wars, to build up fortifications there.

Shortly before the last recorded history of the Old Kingdom, the pass was noted as having been completed and named Qeliit Duun (literally "Fortress Pass").

In the waning days of the Kingdom, a great many enemies vied for the opportunity to weaken it. The most notable came after a foolish royal military advisor announced that the pass was "impervious to attack" and dared the Kingdom's enemies to try, thinking it would draw them out and provide an opportunity to crush them. Instead, it was quickly learned that when enough celestial casters set their minds to collapsing a pass, they can find a way. More importantly, an orcish warlord from the western regions of the Kingdom marched her armies through the pass, complete with giant lizard creatures and trumpet announcements. Within the week, the pass was declared a loss and it was believed it would never again be secure enough for convoys.

With the destruction of the Qeliit Duun, the residents of the pass and the workers who had been tasked with maintaining it scattered into the mountains, trying to find safety while the orcish marauders razed the place. Over time, those original workers on the fortress became the mountain-folk, distanced from society and interestingly, opposed to the reconstruction of the pass. Few among them accept that their ancestors created the original, and those who do tend to cite the fact that enslavement was the only way their ancestors were willing to do so.

Long after the fall of the Old Kingdom and shortly before the empire was formed, several families of dwarves and humans gathered together with a business plan to aid whatever new rulers might arise, and thereby, themselves. They recruited a few others and began an arguably insane plan to widen the pass and fortify it--including against orcs, giant lizards, and elementals--much to the dismay of the mountain-folk already inhabiting the region.

This monumental plan to rebuild the pass began even as the empire began its rise. The Central Company gave themselves a name, recruited, and worked on this project with the goal of having it completed for the next great ruling body, whom they intended to sell or rent the results to at great profit.

Early on, the pass renovation was expected to take twenty or thirty years. This slowed time and again, as

supplies became difficult to get for years until the empire began aiding the Company, forcing the Company to become more insular, taking all jobs upon their own people.

While the mountain-folk were happy to ignore the work for a full generation, eventually the explosions in the pass and protectiveness of the Company became too much for them to turn a blind eye toward. They began raiding, not for goods, but to weaken the resolve of the company and get them to stop claiming all of the natural resources closest to the pass. That competition between the groups lasts to this day, though it has settled down in recent years to little more than a natural dislike of each others' methods, rather than outright warfare.

The turning of the empire's full attention to the pass nearly a hundred years ago coincided with the celebration of the Company's final completion of the pass and fortresses dotting it. Initially, it's assumed that the empire was investigating a possible enemy force, not expecting the Company to welcome them with pre-written lease agreement for the pass. Negotiation occurred and a deal was hashed out on a two hundred and fifty year agreement, granting the empire sole rights to staff and use the pass...and a strict agreement that they will allow the Company to utilize it for non-military matters. In essence, the pass and its villages, fortress, and any hidden service tunnels are under imperial law and managed by a mix of Company and empire staff. The standing belief that the Company maintains both hidden routes through the fortresses and possible sabotage points has created an understanding of mutual respect and unlikeliness of the contract being broken.

Through this all, the mountain-folk have tried to remain scarce. They want to be left alone, but continue to eye the use of the pass as a potential for abuse of their people. Should they decide that the empire is using it to their detriment, the mountain-folk are expected to once again begin raids and random attacks.

## Leaders

*Central Company:* The leadership of the Central Company is about what one might expect from a company of this sort. A team of representatives from the original families (plus a few extra families, due to contract modifications over the years) act as a board of directors, guiding both the day-to-day work and future plans for the company as a whole. Given that all members of the company share in profits to varying degrees, the board is entirely answerable to the employees, though they were chosen by their respective families due to a high amount of trust. Generally, their actions are accepted without question.

Unlike many traditional businesses, it is impossible for someone outside the working families to ever hold any management role in the company, or receive family payments from it.

All board of director positions are NPC roles and may be specified in this packet at a later time.

*Mountain-folk:* Like many outskirt cultures, the mountain-folk revere their elders and wise people in their villages, elevating their decisions above most other voices in the community. Decisions of these elders tend to be based on superstition and interpretations of forces of nature.

Each village or community runs itself completely independently of other mountain-folk groups, and as such, it is not uncommon for them to have drastically different opinions and reactions to the things that they encounter. It is only when a major event affects multiple villages that they tend to work together, though intermarriage between communities is extremely frequent.

The leaders of these villages tend to be older NPC characters and are generally retired from everything except acting as elder for their village. Specific people may be added to this packet at a later time.

### **Allies and Adversaries**

#### *Central Company*

- Allies
  - The empire. So long as business remains good and the empire abides by all agreements, they will be considered the company's sole ally. If the Company gets involved in new businesses, whoever they work for will naturally fall into this category as well. They have little use for allies beyond their employer, though that's not to say they won't work with others on a more temporary basis.
- Neutral
  - The mountain-folk and other "savages" are often viewed neutrally-to-poorly by the company, and as an impediment to progress. The Company tends to view them neutrally...but warily...until they appear to take any action that might interfere with the company's work, then they move rapidly (and temporarily) to the enemies list.
- Enemies
  - Given the current arrangement with the empire, the company's enemies tend to only be the empire's enemies, as those are the people most likely to either interfere with the pass or try to destroy it. This tends to take the form of the empire notifying the Company that someone (for example, the

Remnants) is trying to storm the pass, so the Company treats that group as their sworn enemy until the threat passes. It's all just business, though. Nothing personal.

#### *Mountain-folk*

- Allies
  - No known allies outside their own people, though they frequently trade peacefully with villages closest to their range, so long as they are treated kindly and respectfully.
- Neutral
  - Neutral is essentially how the mountain-folk view everyone who hasn't attacked them or caused problems for them. They have little interest in people other than their own, but also no hatred for them innately.
- Enemies
  - For the mountain-folk, this is a very small group. Given their lack of concern for anything that doesn't affect them directly, it tends to take a lot to get on the enemies list. However, the people who do, rarely know it until they're being attacked. Mountain-folk enemies tend to be those who dammed a river, wiped out local food supplies, or caused other tribal problems, often unwittingly.

### **Laws**

*Central Company:* Laws for the company are more like business guidelines, though they take them with the seriousness most would for actual laws.

- Always aim to help your people profit.
- Those who don't work, aren't contributing to the communal profit.
- Those who can't work, clearly aren't trying hard enough. Elderly and children try to make excuses, but ultimately, they simply need to find work appropriate to their skills.
- Time is silver. Community is silver. Pretty much everything should make money. If it doesn't, why is it part of your life?
- Keep your creations intact, to complete your legacy. Those who bought them or use them are irrelevant. Make them take care of your creations, whether they want to, or not.
- Everyone must honor their contracts. If they cannot, the contract was clearly poorly written and they should learn through suffering how to do better.
- Theft should only occur as part of negotiation and is entirely reasonable, so long as it was part of the deal.

- A contract without profit is slavery. Those trying to enforce such a deal must be destroyed...usually through new contracts.
- Interest payments are proof that someone cares enough to remember you every month.
- Necromancy and other forms of chaos magic are cheating those who have completed their work from enjoying watching their residuals for eternity. Everyone deserves to watch the profit continue after their demise and necromancy must never deprive anyone's family of ongoing contracts.

*Mountain-folk:* Laws tend to vary by region, village, or community, but the mountain-folk do have a few standards:

- Always work for the benefit of your people.
- Attacking an outside group without cause will likely bring unwanted attention to your people, so it's better to walk away if possible.
- The people in the pass are crazy. Better to leave them alone. Your people don't want their attention.
- Personal property is village/tribe property. Share to thrive...but only with our own people, generally.
- Those who take from the village or try to seize its traditional lands are the enemy and should be stopped or destroyed.
- All creatures kill and there is no crime in doing so, as long as it was for a good reason.
- Use of chaos magic is against the will of the people, and always hurts one's village/tribe. It's something the company does, not the mountain-folk.

#### \*\*\*\*Customs and Holidays

Mountain-folk  
Central Company

#### Racial Influences

*Central Company*

- Dark Elves, Dwarves, Humans
  - The original members of the company were almost exclusively from these races, due to who the specific families were who began the work. Most senior members of the company will still be from these races.
- All other races
  - The company has hired both individuals and families from every known race, including a few monstrous ones, based on the specific tradeskill needs of the moment. There are

no racial restrictions or expectations from the company.

#### *Mountain-folk*

- Elves (any), Humans, Hobblings, and Sylvanborn
  - These races are the most plentiful people in the various tribes of the mountain-folk and the ones least likely to cause alarm if they were to appear in their villages.
- Half-Ogres, Half-Orcs, and Wylderkin
  - These races have long been somewhat on their own in the mountain-folk lands. While they share many of the attitudes and beliefs, they are generally segregated to their own villages and areas. They will aid the others in major efforts to repel invaders, but then will normally return to their own areas.
- All other races
  - The remaining races do appear within mountain-folk communities, but not in great numbers. They tend to be adopted in or have chosen to live among the mountain-folk after being born elsewhere.