

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.

Outer Tundra

AWY Local Culture Packet v2.00 (Last edited 5/2021)

Taking a short break from pulling rocks out of the hard dry soil, Teirelle stretched his back and looked up at the blue-white sky. As was the norm that time of year--which lasted about eight months--vast white clouds rolled across the lands to the west, bringing snow off the ocean. Snow brought water, even if it did make growing anything more difficult. Or at least that all was what he had been told, having only lived in the area for a little more than a month.

Waiting for warmer weather was rarely an option for these people. It was safer for their stores to plant hardy deep-soil foods and cover them when storms were at their worst.

Teirelle kicked a rock out of the plot he was working and then set to hoeing out some of the smaller ones. He only managed to make it a few more minutes before he felt that something was just *wrong*.

Freezing where he was, Teirelle quickly went through the mental checklist the locals had beaten into him. Under his thick boots, there was no sense of rumbling. Sniffing, the air remained as dry as ever, giving no sign of upcoming rain. The wind...

Teirelle glanced toward his cabin and the rest of the village in the distance beyond. High atop the roof of his house, he had hung several feathers from an old rusted windchime. The chimes were silent and not even the feathers were moving.

Swearing under his breath, he let his hoe fall and pulled up his heavy coat sleeve. Whether from his fear or something coming, all of the hair on his arm stood on end. If he doubted his instincts on this, the sudden fall in air temperature around him laid those doubts to rest. Arctic land or not, the temperature rarely changed that dramatically without something dire coming.

Teirelle did not pause to consider other options and took off running for his house. As soon as he was moving, he saw that others in their sections of the community fields either had their own concerns or had seen him and were likewise dashing for shelter and weapons.

Sliding to a stop near his front door, Teirelle grabbed his simple old bow and weathered quiver, as well as a rusted sword, which he kept outside when he was working for just such a situation as this. The items had once been well-maintained when he was officially representing the empire's military, but now they were a farmer's tools. Throwing the quiver over his shoulder and shoving the sheathed sword into his belt, he turned to face whatever might come this time.

No sooner than he and a few others prepared themselves than the area went silent. It was no longer just the wind dying down, but everything was deathly quiet and not a single bird could be seen anywhere. For several long minutes, Teirelle watched the vast fields, while his neighbors silently exchanged glances, clearly unsure whether they had overreacted.

A sharp crack erupted from somewhere ahead of him, and could be felt as much as heard. Before the sound had even begun to fade, a faint shimmer bent the air sideways and split it open, creating a vague doorway that hung over the center of the field. Immediately, mist-shrouded shapes emerged, which could be mistaken for tiny snowstorms, if one were to ignore the two--or more--legs and arms they possessed.

"Attack!" shouted one of the other villagers, apparently having appointed himself leader for the day. No one questioned, and a dozen archers like Teirelle drew and fired on the elementals, arrows freezing and breaking as they struck the lead creature. Though the ice destroyed the arrow shafts, the metal heads appeared to crack and shatter the elemental's body.

The foremost ice elemental staggered as the arrows hit it, and it tried to take another stride, only to fall apart and dissipate in a fresh cloud of mist. Behind it, another similar creature stepped through onto the field, seeming to have no concern for the puddle of partially-frozen water that had been its fellow a moment earlier. More elementals emerged at its sides, the portal widening with each that got through.

The portal's ever-growing entrance soon allowed Teirelle to see literal hundreds of frozen shapes moving in their direction. His time in the imperial military cried in the back of his mind to retreat, as the numbers he saw were larger than most of the armies they had faced, but there was nowhere to go.

A second wave of arrows arced through the air and pounded into the creatures, causing two more to crackle as they broke and faded away. The arrows which missed their marks hit the portal and froze completely, even the metal tips shattering as they hit the "ground" on the far side..

"Ready a third!" shouted someone else, and Teirelle drew another arrow. Before he had it drawn, the portal in the field wavered and disappeared as suddenly as it had arrived.

Panting, but keeping his arrow ready, Teirelle waited for a little while, staring at the field. At long last, he and the others accepted that the attack had been a mild one and relaxed their grips on their weapons.

"You okay, Tier?" asked the woman at the house to his left, grinning. "Looking a little shaken."

"Still not used to it," he admitted, laughing.

"Empire not teaching their scouts that this is what they're in for?" one of the dwarven boys from his other side inquired.

Teirelle shook his head. "They don't believe our reports. Why would they train anyone for this if they don't believe those already here?"

"Going to bother writing this one up?"

Snorting, Teirelle answered, "Why would I? They already think I'm crazy. So long as I send survey reports, they keep sending us supplies. There's only so many times I can ask for reinforcements."

"Care to come by for dinner later?" the woman asked next, as though the conversation was entirely routine...which it was becoming, even for Teirelle.

"Assuming we don't get attacked again, sure."

The woman shrugged. "Even if we do, offer's open. Can't put off living because of a few water sprites."

"A few?" Teirelle questioned, waving his hand toward where the portal had been. "Did you see how many were waiting to come through?"

"Aye. Always is, if you get a good look. Try not to pay attention to what isn't on this side and you'll be happier. In a few months, you won't even notice. Can't let a little army get you down. See you at sundown for dinner?"

Culture Basics

The Periphery Tundra, or "Outer Tundra" as the empire refers to it, is not nearly as desolate as one might expect from the name. Instead, it is a high-altitude scrubland, filled with rolling hills, few trees, and a handful of old glaciers in its northernmost reaches. It is remote, but potentially hospitable to people...yet hosts remarkably few.

A handful of tribes and several empire outposts dot the Outer Tundra's rough terrain, cutting out survival in what should not be the worst location. However, unlike other regions where the empire and the locals clash for control, here the two often band together for survival.

If one were to ask fresh arrivals to the Tundra why the locals are so willing to hole up in their villages, it is not uncommon to hear lengthy stories about how the residents are paranoid by old tales of nature turning against civilization to the point of hallucinations. They will claim that the isolation gets to people, making them a touch crazy.

The story from the locals and others who have been there more than a few months is quite different. They will tell tales of shimmering portals opening out of nowhere, then belching out "creatures made up of the forces of nature" (elementals). These surprise attacks by elementals range from annoying all the way to the obliteration of one of the empire's outposts shortly after it was completed.

What is unquestionable is that a great many villages and outposts have vanished over time, leaving the remaining population quite ready to go anywhere else in the world. Those who have fled the Tundra will often have lasting fears of large bodies of water or ice, even if they have never seen one of the Tundra's portals with their own eyes. Still others will have superstitions about where a town or village can safely be built. The unpredictability of the Tundra leaves its mark on everyone.

Civilized, uncivilized, it means little to those from the Periphery Tundra. They concern themselves with having a

solid floor or road under their feet and a watchful guard at all times to ensure that the place they currently reside will survive until morning. People from both backgrounds tend to be jumpy when they feel static in the air, whether it be from a coming storm or an elemental portal about to open.

A few small groups on the tundra have embraced the elemental invasion as the natural course of the world. These tend to be individual families, who have fallen into an almost cultish reverence for elementals...not that their feelings matter to mindless creatures of primal forces. If the elementals are even aware they have followers, there appears to be no way to know.

Costume Ideas

Though many people living in--or having lived in--the Tundra were from the empire or other regions, the harsh weather and struggle to survive leads most to quickly adopt a simple style of attire. These people prize drab attire--better to avoid attention--and equipment that does its job efficiently, rather than with flare and style. It's not to say they don't appreciate a fine weapon or well-crafted armor, but they understand that almost everything must be made quickly, must endure the elements, and will likely be replaced soon. This mindset does not lend itself to collecting things for appearance.

Likewise, displayed wealth or symbols of authority are viewed as somewhat pointless to the people of the Tundra. Money will not stop one's enemies or matter to those dragging you away from a creature made of ice. They tend to shun jewelry and other obvious riches, though some do collect such baubles, often due to personal significance, rather than monetary value.

The exception to the norm for the region are those who are adherents of the various elemental-following groups. These people often wear garb that proudly displays elemental symbology or related sigils. Such use of symbols also makes it easier for the majority of people on the tundra to openly avoid these people's camps when traveling.

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.

While this section will dive into some behaviors that result from this culture's background, it does not mandate some of the natural conclusions one might draw from them. For example, the implied fear or hatred of elementals does not prohibit these characters from using elemental spells or items, though players should give thought to explaining why they do in-character. This goes doubly for choices such as aiding elementals, if their

history implies they should fear them. This culture packet does not require one direction or the other in such decisions, but players should think through the “why” of such choices (and understand the societal consequences of related choices).

Whether a character is relatively new to the Outer Tundra or a tenth generation local, they will have seen things and heard far more from their neighbors. Most cultures have an oral or written history of attacks by raiders, bandits, or such, but those from the Outer Tundra are entirely wrapped around being attacked without reason or warning by elementals, who often vanish as suddenly as they appeared. In all of the region’s history, no one has truly invaded...or rather, those who have, ended up fighting beside the locals to fend off elemental incursions, almost as though the elementals are attracted to large gatherings.

Those playing characters from this region should consider what that constant fear of attack from icy extraplanar creatures would do to their personalities. How do they feel about elementals? Magic in general? What have they done to survive? What possible explanation have their families made to justify the attacks? These questions will shape a lot of the personality of such characters.

Setting aside the creatures from other dimensions appearing in town regularly, the residents of the Outer Tundra are fairly mundane. They are hardy survivors, working to eke out a life in a slightly-harsh environment, where there are few easily-reached water sources or viable farmland. The locations where springs pop up or crops will grow are usually secured by people from all around, working to ensure nothing destroys them. Hunting paths are often family secrets, to help minimize over-hunting in an area.

All-in-all, the Outer Tundra’s people simply want to survive and are incredibly good at it in adverse conditions. They have little time or interest in much else, as their homeland has little else to offer them. If an activity or task leads to improved odds of their people surviving, it’s worth doing, no matter the difficulty.

Please take note that all characters from the tundra are from the *southern* Outer Tundra. The northern half is covered by glaciers and is not occupied by any known group.

History of the Region

The lifelong residents of the Outer Tundra pass down stories that speak of generations of peace after the fall of the Old Kingdom. Before that...there’s almost nothing in the historical stories. It’s almost as though there were no cultures living in the region before the Old Kingdom (or if there was, it died out).

Empire records from early searches of the region hint that there are signs that the Old Kingdom initially sent either prisoners or political enemies to the region as a

“kindness”, using the region as a form of prison camp. Some truly old documents indicate there was a physical prison far in the north end of the tundra, though the location is lost to time. The records seem to hint at it having been on or near the glacier that the local people claim was their ancestral homeland, before the coming of the ice elementals.

Whatever the truth of the region’s Old Kingdom involvements, the tundra remained ignored and largely quiet until about a hundred and fifty years ago, when the first waves of ice elementals were reported, though many believe they had existed farther north before that. It is accepted that something pushed the elementals closer to the inhabited regions in the southern sections of tundra, instead of the more remote glacier in the northern portion. Perhaps the elementals simply took notice of the villages nearby, but the truth remains a mystery.

The bards and story-weavers among the people spin the ancient heroes as having faced off against creatures of pure ice or nature, holding them back for millennia, though when this might have actually happened is anyone’s guess. Whatever the “heroes” might have done previously is long since forgotten, allowing the ice elementals to now appear on the doorsteps of the residents--sometimes literally.

Within the last decade, the empire’s scouting teams began marching farther and farther into the Outer Tundra, largely unimpeded by the locals. Generally, the response from the local people being told that they are now under the authority of the empire has been to say, “Let us know when you decide that was a bad idea! Thanks for the roads.”

Early empire scouts had been largely positive in their reporting, claiming to have found new and willing citizens, as well as a variety of hardy plants that could be grown in almost any climate. Gradually, those reports shifted to concern over legends of monsters coming out of nowhere, and finally most scouts stopped sending reports altogether. This is typically the time when those scouts have realized that the empire is much too far away to help, and instead join the locals in fighting back the creatures that come.

For both lifelong residents and the newer empire people, each day eventually blurs into a nonstop struggle to survive against a difficult land and a far more challenging enemy.

Leaders

Locals: Given the lack of travel and limited access to the outside world, the locals of the tundra have very little organized leadership. Instead, a given community will usually have either a family-based system where each family leads itself and speaks up for community decisions, or a handful of commonly-recognized voices in the community who can speak for the group as a whole.

Among the elemental-followers, leadership is often very strictly status-based, with higher-ranking members having absolute say over the lives of the lower-ranking. Were a

sentient ice elemental to appear, it would become the de facto leader of any such group.

Empire Scouts: The emperor is the sole leader, with military commanders and squad leads as the voice of the emperor locally. There is never a question about the chain of command for these people, as it is an integral part of the structure they accepted before being sent out as scouts. Once that chain of command begins to break down over time, many adopt the ways of the locals, though some maintain their military arrangements.

Allies and Adversaries

Locals

- Allies
 - During attacks, most tundra villages will band together with any others within range to request aid from. They have been known to even temporarily ally with bandit groups and some of the sentient monstrous tribes.
 - Imperials who have been around long enough to have endured several elemental attacks are considered “locals” as far as the residents are concerned.
- Neutral
 - When not under attack, most tundra villages take a fairly unconcerned stance toward other local villages. They are willing to tolerate most groups, including freshly-arrived imperials, no matter their philosophies.
- Enemies
 - Elementals, due to their ongoing attacks. Specifically, water/ice elementals.
 - Those who espouse a belief in the “ways of nature”, a catch-all term for the followers of the ice elementals. These people are largely viewed as insane and would be pitied if they did not help the tundra’s enemies attack villages.
 - Those who routinely attack the residents of the tundra, including various bandit groups and several monstrous peoples. Anyone in this category can be temporarily forgiven if they are willing to help repel attacks.

Empire Scouts

- Allies
 - Officially, none. The scouts from the empire are sent with a purpose, not to make new friends. This tends to last a few weeks, until the scouting team realizes how desperate their situation in the tundra is.
- Neutral

- This is the official stance of the empire with regard to the sentient peoples of the tundra (or most other lands they approach).
- Enemies
 - The empire views any non-sentient creatures and anything that interferes with their supply trains or roads as enemies.

Laws

Locals: The residents of the Outer Tundra honestly don’t have a lot of use for laws. Their legal system largely consists of unspoken social lines that people should not cross, unless they really want to be left out in the cold to starve.

The accepted norms for the locals:

- We all work together and we all survive a day longer.
- We don’t have to like each other, we just have to work together.
- Those who won’t help the community or who help our enemies survive are not part of the community. There’s some scenic glacial plateaus they might enjoy being dropped off on for an overnight stay.
- Don’t panic. Yes, there are tens of thousands of ice elementals coming. We’ll be fine.

Empire Scouts: Those coming from the empire’s ranks tend to adhere solely to the empire’s laws for a time after their arrival. They announce the laws in detail, post them, remind the locals what the laws are...then gradually leave them behind as they realize they’re in a war zone and won’t get any backup. Most empire troops have adopted the locals’ “laws” within three to six months. Until then, the empire’s official laws apply, which will be posted outside of this packet.

****Customs and Holidays

Locals:

Empire Scouts:

Racial Influences

Locals

- Dwarf, Half-Orc, Hobling, Selunari
 - These are the original races of the region, who occupied the southern reaches of the tundra for generations. Why these specific races or when they first arrived is unknown and lost to history.

- All other races
 - Anyone not of the above races arrived sometime in the last hundred years, either as part of a scouting party, or trying to escape something in another part of the world. No one comes to the tundra because they like the weather.

Empire Scouts

- Any race
 - The empire consists of people of all races and backgrounds. As such, those who recently arrived in the tundra as part of one of the scouting parties could be any race whatsoever.