

# Deep Elves

(Tson'Chi)

## Basic Cultural Information

Deep Elf society is Patriarchal and military based, there are 5 ruling clans each with a Lord and the leader of the Tiger clan is the Crown Emperor, while the Emperor has slightly more power than the other clans the empire is run as a council of the 5 leaders, no one man should make the decision of all the clans. Each clan has a province that functions as a small self-ruled empire. The lands of what the Deep Elves claim as their empire are high in the mountain of Norvis, north of Cunech

Deep Elves have been recorded to live past the age of 250 years, though many do not live past 180 as the life of constant war takes a toll.

Like most society's men and women fall into traditional roles, there are tasks that are a woman's job and those that are a man's; however, unlike other races this does not lead to a sense of one sex being stronger or weaker. While serving in the military all are created equal, everyone is pushed to achieve the same expectations.

Deep Elves come from a long line of warriors, it does not matter if you are male or female; poet, scholar, or farmer; you serve your time as a warrior. When an individual comes of age at age 20 they enter into the military, here they harden their martial skills as well as their knowledge of the world. From there they must serve in some aspect of the military for 20 years, while this does seem like an extensive amount of time it is mostly training and more like reserves with stints of active duty. The purpose for the long period in service is to harden into each member of society their place in society, in servitude of each other. After their required service they can choose to stay, being stationed sometimes in their home province as militia or serving in the grand army at the emperor's' command. The reason behind this strict military lifestyle is it is the only way they have survived, for as long as history has recorded the Deep Elves have been at war constantly with the Dark Dwarves for territorial reasons. The strong military allows life to exist as normal in their homelands while a war can still be surmounted at the fringes. Many Deep Elves that leave the provinces and choose to travel to other lands and stay quickly find themselves in the local military or militia due to years of extensive training and experience it comes naturally to them. When choosing skills keep in mind Craft or Knowledge skills that might reflect your specialized tasks you were trained in while serving. This military life while it is the platform for society makes it the backbone not the mold, order and reverence for the law is had but that does not make all of the Deep Elves war mongers, for every soldier there are 100 that return to the life of a simple farmer or poet, who without all the efforts would be pointless and their rich heritage they fight to protect would be lost. Though at a moment's notice all those that once served would be armed and ready to answer the call of war should it be called.

## **Clans of the Tson'Chi**

### **Clan Eneri- Spider**

Population- Approx. 28,000

Capitol- Kirin

**Provence-** This province is into the valley north of the Widows Pass on the eastern face of the Sunpeak Mountains. The capital is actually built into the face of the mountain making it very difficult to lay siege to.

**Society-** Clan Eneri over the millennium have been set with the task of being a constant oppression to the Dark Dwarves that inhabit the mountain, keeping them occupied in one place keeps them from waging war into the other provinces. While they are always at war, it would seem it is more of a cold war; blitzkrieg raids on outlying military posts, attacks on mining operations, and the like. While like many other clans they produce most of the materials needed for their society they are also the second largest producers of rice and cane, the lush valley and the cooler temperatures all for its massive growth. Their other major contribution is the silk that they harvest from the ether spiders deep in the mountains, the silk is almost as strong as steel when worked by a skilled craftsman and only a third the weight.

### **Clan Mong'fae- Sickle**

Population- Approx. 36,000

Capitol- Voewen

**Provence-** Located on the western face of the north portion of the Sunpeak Mountains leading out into the lush grasslands to the west. The lands here are very fertile and much of the empires wheat and rice are grown from this region.

**Society-** While the region is vastly agricultural and livestock based, the clan has also become skilled builders. Since the land is mostly grasslands they have had to develop ways to sculpt stone and earth to build their homes and cities. The capitol was one of the last to have a full palace in the empire and that only came in the wake of a group of skilled alchemists who found a way to harden packed soil blocks so that they became like granite. Being not only the number one producer of rice for all the provinces they also grow a majority of the wheat that is consumed across the empire.

### **Clan Teir'n Sune- Emblazoned Crown**

Population- Approx. 22,000

Capitol- Gama'Suri

**Provence-** Located atop the mountains to the east of the Widows Pass. The only real access to the province is by crossing the Son-Li Bridge; the bridge is almost 2 miles in length and was designed by gnomish engineers with invasion safeties that cause the bridge to collapse. Due to its secure location many of the clan records and important artifacts are stored in the vaults within Gama'Suri.

**Society-** While the region is all mountainous the clan has learned to adjust and make the most of the land as well as the earth under the peaks. The majority of the towns and villages are located underground and are connected by an intricate network of tunnels. Many claim that living in this fashion gives great respect to the past and those that came

before the new kingdom. Among their other skills many of the greatest are the works of art that this clan brings to the empire, while other clans have their skilled crafters almost any of note were traded here by the masters. Gama'Suri is also the location of the first dynasty vault, constructed not long after the clans were born by the same gnomes that built the bridge. The vault protects the clans oldest and most prized relics and secrets, when crafted the gnomes made a bargain with Tiger, they would allow all knowledge of how the vault was crafted and how to open it in exchange they could place one item in it for safe keeping. It is said that only one person each generation knows how to open the vault; as to how this person is picked or how the knowledge is taught is only known by the keeper whoever that might be.

### **Clan Kurusi- Tiger**

Population- Approx. 47,000

Capitol- Astyrth

**Provence-** Located at the northern end of the Sunpeak Mountains. This region is significant as while being a mountain top it is actually a plateau that is approx. 12 sq. miles in size. The capitol was built at the site where Tiger first summoned the Sky Spirit, near the heart of the city there is a shrine devoted to the king's fallen sage so that all will remember that we are all but servants of our fellow man.

**Society-** As the first clan they still hold the lands of the first empire. The capital is one of the most massive cities in the entire mountain range. The bulk of the grand army lives and serves out of the southern end of the capitol, located about 10 miles south of proper; there is an extensive training ground and military facility. The facility is capable of housing and training up to 9000 soldiers, and stores the majority of the army's weapon surplus and war machines.

### **Clan Onobishi- Whisping Eye**

Population- Approx. 18,000

Capitol- Koreth

**Provence-** The southernmost province is located mostly in the mountains themselves. While the region does extend into the valley below the low mountains make up the majority of the area.

**Society-** Of the great Ho'si elders that survived the darkest night, 6 of them were of this clan; as they felt great action should be taken they petitioned the clan leader at the time to take the lead in removing this sickness from the people. And so from that point on the clan called upon its people for soldiers to join and keep a vigilant eye across all the provinces always on the watch to necromancy; both from outside sources and from those of our kind that strayed into the shadow, no quarter would be given.

#### **Starfall Village**

Located in the lower part of the mountains, and about equal distance from the provinces; this city is moderately populated but still very large, it is the place where almost all trade is done. Two to three times a year merchants, farmers, craftsmen will travel from their homes to the open markets to sell and trade their season's goods for ones they need. This city allows members of the clans to meet and get to know our separated kin, as well as outsiders who travel to the region for trade. Starfall is not just for the Deep Elves but is open to outsiders as a common place for trade; most good from outside the empire pass through

the markets here on the way to their final destination. The village received its name from the fall night sky; something about the altitude and the elements mix in just a way that causes odd stars; bits of airborne sand carried along the range from the great coast in the south mix with the natural elements and glow like tiny stars whipped around in the wind.

## **The Tiger and New Kingdom**

Scribed by Lan'Ki Second Prophet of the Tiger Dynasty

In the days before moon and sun when tiger first ruled, the people were weary and worn from years of battle with both those of the shadow and Moi'ki, the dark dwarves. His great kingdom was being pressed on all sides and tiger had little choice but to seek a new kingdom for his people or they would be lost forever. Tiger set out on his quest to find a place he had long been warned of as a child, the world beyond the darkness; the land of the sky spirit. Tiger left his empire accompanied by only a single sage to record the journey and to aid in his hasty return upon finding a new kingdom. The journey would turn out to be far more difficult than tiger had expected, and much longer as well. Long before any that we know were children the Tson'Chi lived so far below the surface of this world that it was all that existed. The world we lived in was eternal night and caverns, other than the deep dwelling creatures the only being that we knew of were those of the shadow and the Moi'ki. Tiger had left his kingdom to his generals and told them he would send word each week, and that in a months' time he would have found the kingdom of the sky spirit.

During the first week of the journey they traveled to the outer reaches of the lands that he claimed as his kingdom, it was in this first week that he realized that while much ground had been covered it was very little in the upward direction; this must change. With the second week tiger made a triumph. During a short rest tiger and the sage were attacked by a pack of odd spiders they had not seen before, they cut them down all but one they left wounded; and as tiger had designed it ran. Tiger was keen and knew that spiders dwelled in the highest spots they could find so they followed it hoping it would show them a way up, and that it did. They had traveled far enough that the rocks here were different and hid passages better than deeper in the earth. The wounded spider was still quicker than tiger but he was a keen hunter and could track prey on a day cold trail, and that trail was up. After three days of travel with no sleep the spider had gotten away, however it had given them what they needed a route up. This place was indeed a new world, though it was still not what tiger was looking for; the rocks here were softer, there were mosses that even the sage did not recognize, and new strange critters unlike where they had started. They spent a few days resting so that the sage could record all he could, as this information may prove vital both in his peoples coming journey and perhaps a weapon against their foes.

After nearly three weeks in their journey tiger had begun to doubt this mission. Would he find the new kingdom in time to return to his people and lead them to salvation or would he return to find them defeated without his guidance, fallen to their enemies. Tiger pressed onward he has come too far to stop until he reached the new world. The cavernous terrain was treacherous and difficult to traverse, that was until he found a new change in the rock again. The sedimentary properties of this rock were similar to where they had first begun but contained an odd element that they had not before seen, but with this new rock came a new danger. They had found their way into what seemed to be well worked tunnels, worked in a way that was all too familiar he recognized the skill as that of the Moi'ki. How could they have beaten him here or had the earth played some kind trick on them and they had not been moving up all this time but deeper instead. Tiger and the sage slowly made

their way through the tunnels looking for a sign of life and they found it, his fears were confirmed the Moi'ki were here. Perhaps in all these years he had not ever truly known the size of the Moi'ki kingdom and how far they reached, but this changed nothing. They used the tunnels to their advantage and continued finding their way up through the earth, near the upper ends of the worked tunnels they came upon a small band of miners and tiger saw a chance to strike a blow against his foe and possibly get information about the earth above. Tiger and the sage dove in the wake with the fury of a storm, for they could not be certain how many there were lurking in fractures and side tunnels. The battle was short, leaving twelve Moi'ki dead and one on the brink, tiger made the survivors last minutes beyond painful but he took from it every bit of information he could. In the heat of battle and his thirst for the information he had not noticed the sage kneeling peacefully at the other side of the battle field. He called for the sage to make ready to move on, the sage stood slowly and then collapsed. Tiger rushed to his aid, though there was little he could do for him, in time the sage would pass. Tiger carried the sage with him; he would not leave him to die or worse in the Moi'ki domain. With the information tiger had obtained they found their way further up, he knew his was getting close not only had the earth changed here again but the air seemed different it had new smells not just that of stone and dirt. Days from the surface they made camp this would be the last night for the sage, he weakened every minute, a vial poison ran through his blood. With his dying efforts he crafted a scroll so the king would be able to return home to lead the Tson'Chi to their new kingdom.

So close to his goal he would not stop, tiger carried the sages body with him for the rest of his journey, though this slowed his progress greatly he would see to it that the sage received the honor of a burial in the new kingdom for his sacrifice. With his progress slowed greatly by the burden what should have taken days took far longer, and the time of a month had come and gone; the people became worried for their fate was tied with his. Weary, sleep deprived, and near starvation tiger pressed on; time did not seem to exist anymore it all became a blur to the point that he collapsed defeated. As he lay in the darkness of the cavern, he prayed to his ancestors for strength and guidance; how could he have been wrong. Then it came, all at once the rock itself shook and the roar of noise emanated from everywhere like a fierce beast; adrenaline took over he sprang to his feet on guard. It was still and quiet and then it came again, he could feel the sound as it even shook his chest; what could this be. He focused on his surroundings hunting for any clue, and then it came; a sweet smell on the air unlike anything he had smelled before. He gathered the sage's body and pushed onward, the roaring noise came and went and as he moved up the rough tunnel, as he moved he was met by a cool damp breeze. It was refreshing and gave him new drive, he hastened his speed; this must be what he was looking for. As he broke into the new world his senses were overcome by the storm that greeted him, rain, wind, thunder, and lightning all things so foreign to him it was like being attacked at first; but as the storm raged on around him his soul rejoiced for he knew he had found the kingdom of the Sky Spirit.

By morning the storm had subsided, and the tiger became faced with a new power that he would time have to learn to overcome, the sun. As the sun rose into the sky it seared tigers eyes nearly blinding him, he had never experience light like this before; he stripped a piece of sheer cloth and fashioned a blindfold to filter out some of the light so he could still see. He set to the task of digging a grave for the sage, this was to be the tigers new kingdom and so the sages sacrifice would grant him a burial unlike any before him. By late afternoon the dead were buried and tiger surveyed the terrain, if this was to be his new kingdom he must first make a deal with its keeper the Sky Spirit; he prepared for his attempt

to commune. For hours tiger chanted trying to summon the Sky Spirit, and finally it came with a blast of wind that unseated tiger, rolling him backwards on the mountains top.

"Whhhhy hhhhave to sssummoned me deep one, hhhhave you become losst." The winds hissed.

"I am Orin Tetsari lord of the Tson'Chi, and have summoned you to make plea for your blessing for my people. Our kingdom is lost and without a new land we will be lost to time as well." Tiger called out as he bowed to the sky.

"I sssee and what ssshall you do for me." The wind whisked as it whipped through the rocks.

"For my people I shall make what bargain you desire."

"Very well I hhhaave a tasssk for you but not yet, I will come for you in time. You hhhave my blessing, hhhowever I leave you thiss warning; your kingdom will not sssurvive withh one hhhoussse alone." With that the Sky Spirit was gone and the mountain top erupted with change.

For miles the peak became flat and lush with soil and grass. Tiger retrieved the scroll the sage had scribed and followed its every detail exactly; tracing out a circle with special powders and completing certain incantations. The circle seared itself into the ground and began to glow; he continued and finished the scroll. The circle glowed brightly and he was transported back to the city. From the ritual chamber he could hear the sounds of battle; he rushed to the doors to find his kingdom under siege of the shadow, and losing for his people had lost hope. He rushed headlong into the fray, his fury burning as hot as the sun; he had not come all this way to fail his people now. As he waded through the enemy army, he cried out "For I am Tiger, Lord of the Tson'Chi, and on this day Dragon you shall not take my people."

It is said that when he spoke the ancestors heard his call, and that Orin's voice resonated to the edge of the kingdom; and that his voice and words gave his people hope and filled them with the strength to over though the attacking forces. While many had been lost the day would be a victory; word was spread like fire, that all should gather that they could not live without and come to the palace. For days the kingdoms sages emptied all the stores in the vault to transport people to the new kingdom. It is said that when tiger's people arrived at the mountain top that their ancestors had called upon the great spirits and that they had provided for the Tson'Chi one thousand felled trees so that they may build a new home in the sun.

## **Legend of the Five Kings**

Scribed by Mang Su, Scribe of House Ereni

As the Sky Spirit had promised the Tson'Chi had our new home, a kingdom that surpassed all they had left behind. For decades the kingdom underwent changes, we had to learn to exist in this new world on many fronts. The two hardest changes were how to exist in a world so brighter, we spent many years being nocturnal though by the end of the first decade we had all but made the transition into the light. This came with its draw backs, for as our eyes adjusted to the new world we lost our ability to see in the dark of night which for many seemed like they had cut off a hand. The second hurdle that we had to overcome was how to survive; the plants and animals of this world were new and hard to master. Perhaps

the only reason we survived is that the water spirit had graced us with a lake and river bountiful with fish. The kingdom grew in almost every direction, from off the edge of the mountain top into the high cliff faces, to down into the earth for we had a new world but there was no reason to completely abandon the old one. The earth here was rich with minerals some like we had never seen before they had both medicinal property and elements that could be worked into weapons far superior to those of our past.

Yes our people had been given new life and a new hope for survival; but this was not the past and Tiger saw this as the time to change old ways to ensure his empire would survive. Orin was nearly 180 years of age before he decided to take a bride, and as his first true change to tradition so he changed the process by which he would choose; and so the Festival of the Lotus and Knife was created, but I will leave that to another to tell. At the closing of the first festival Tiger had chosen his bride, she would be the first Tson'Chi princess; she was everything that he wanted all females to aspire to. She was beautiful, educated, and skills in martial combat; he hoped that having such would inspire all females to follow in her image. Tiger never shared with her what the Sky Spirit had told him, only that she was to give him an heir. Orin spent many weeks in prayer asking again for his ancestors to guide him and to help save his people, while the Sky Spirit had said one house would not be enough to survive he was not sure how he would divide the kingdom. After a few years she became pregnant and Tiger was relieved that he would be able to save his people, but as time went on things for them seemed to worsen. She became ill as she came closer and closer to the time of the child's birth. No sage could seem to cure her growing illness and they feared that she and the child may both die in the end, in the final days she shared with Tiger her own secret. When she had been but a child she was visited while in prayer by a creature of mist whose voice crackled and hissed, it offered her the chance to give new life to her people and ensure that they would exist for all time and she took it even though it told her the cost would be her life. Orin was overcome he knew just the creature, rage and fear both filled him, he clung to the hopes this was all part of the ancestors plan, they would not lead him astray. On the night of the birth she faded like a flower in winter, but she had given the king far more than an heir, she had given him four sons born at once all in perfect health.

The king spent the next few days in contemplation, thinking how best to honor his people and how to do what was best for their survival; finally he devised a simple plan. As their now past mother was one of the people so would be his sons, each of the four boys was placed with a family who was bound to tell no one of where the child came from. The families were each from a different portion of the kingdom, they were not given anything for this service, no money no land tithe only the honor of what it would bring to the kingdom one day. Tiger's hope was that by growing up as a part of the people that one day when they were brought to lead they would be leaders of the people; while he was the voice of his people he was far removed from the common man. For the next hundred years the boys grew not knowing of each other or their true father, they were educated as the common were, they worked in fields and forges; their life was one of toil not of privilege. They lived their lives as simple men, until they reached the century mark. As with tradition when boys reached one hundred years they are given a right of passage into manhood, which ends with them serving in the military for a decade before they return to society. Even though we had gone without war since we came to the new world, it was tradition and peace would not last forever. These next years the king tracked their growth and development as leaders, and as he had hoped they all had the drive to lead and were respected by those they served with. When their ten years had passed he knew it was time for them to be told the truth.

The four were brought to the grand palace, none knew why; they were kept in separate wings until all had arrived. They were each escorted into the throne room, and for the first time they saw themselves as reflections, they were stunned and confused as to the truth of what was happening. After a few moments Tiger entered the throne room and they quickly knelt. He made his way to the throne and gave them leave to stand, but only stand and listen.

“I am sure that right now you are trapped between disbelief and confusion, but in time all will be made clear. I assure you that your eyes do not deceive you; you are brothers all from the same birth. You are the hope for our people, and much has been sacrificed by many to bring us to this moment so heed my words. When you were born I sent you to be raised by your people so that one day when it came your time to lead you would be grounded and the people would be your priority. It is now your time and your duty to us all, each of you will lead a portion of our people to the site you will build your city and your kingdom. This will no longer be a kingdom of one house but an empire of five clans, and we shall bring our people into a new age together.” Orin paused.

“I cannot explain the joy that fills me and these halls, for over a century I have lead with sorrow in my heart; unable to be a father to my children and unable to forget your mothers face and her sacrifice. There will be much time for us to talk as men and as family; but before that there are tasks that I need you to fulfill. Each of you must choose your crest and your clans name, in one months’ time there will be a festival at which time you will be coroneted before our people and each must choose a bride. From there you will lead the people that will become your clan to your new kingdoms.”

The four men stood stunned, without even a thought of what to say or ask; but all feeling and knowing that deep in their soul they had always known they were someone more than a man. For a moment they broke and greeted each other with handshake and embrace; they could feel the bond of their blood. This moment of excitement quickly faded and the each returned to their rooms to gather their thoughts. Within a week each of the four had chosen name and symbol they felt represented himself and their people. The king had banners crafted of the finest silks that would be hung during the festival; as well each man was given garb and blade fit for a king. For the next few weeks the men lived together and bonded, sharing their stories and their lives, becoming closer again as family; this was all so much at once but to all of them it felt right. By the time the Lotus and Knife festival started word had spread over the empire that Tiger was to announce what they believed to be a new clan. Guards were sent out from the palace in the 4 directions to segment the people by marking each home with the color of their new lord, though the why was not told to the residence.

On the first night of the festival all of the Tson’Chi gathered near the grand palace in hopes to see Tiger and hear his words; when the time came Tiger stepped onto the mid-tier balcony to a roar of cheers. He began;

“Tonight is a night unlike any before for our people; my heart is filled with joy for tonight I know that our people will survive the test of time. This is a kingdom but soon we will be an empire; one that shall be known from sunrise to sunset and beyond.” With a motion the four sons stepped from the room to join their father on the balcony and their banners unrolled to reveal their marks. There was a hush in the crowd and a stir of confusion.

“I am sure by now you have all seen the colored mark that has been placed on your homes; they are to signify your new clan and your people.” Tiger introduced each of the four men to the people, naming each lord of their new clan. With each name the people of his

province rejoiced, and their families that had raised them were given honor from Tiger for what they had done for the Tson'Chi to raise and mold its new leaders.

"But enough of politics for now, we are here to celebrate the future of our people; let the festival begin." The king bowed to his people to show them honor and he and the four men moved back into the building.

Normally the festival only last for seven days and nights but due to the importance of this event it lasted for an extra three days. And by the end the four sons and Tiger had all chosen brides to dawn a new era of the Tson'Chi.

### **Arcane Spirit and the Wu'gi Sorcerers**

Scribed by Tevin 3<sup>rd</sup> Prophet of Clan Onobishi

Ancestors. What is it that this word means to you? Are they simply those who came before you, who ensured you would have a place in this world; or are they just history that is lost? In truth they are far greater than either of these thoughts, for without them who we are is nothing and to be nothing is to not exist. I assure you we both do exist and that is because of them; their actions, their sacrifices, their love, and their name. To understand where you are going you cannot simply walk but you must know the path or you do not move. Like all things in time we die, either by age or by the blade, and when we leave this world we leave behind more than we were in life. We become part of the force that feeds and drives our people, for even in death we are always present. While in many cultures there is the foolish belief of reincarnation, like some poor man's second chance at life; but hold no truth in this. Beyond life there is only death and the spirit world, were all those who came before now reside.

Why is our spirit so susceptible to magic you ask? Well that is by far one of the easiest riddles to explain, it is because of our ancestors and who they made us. While you cannot see them standing beside you, they are all around you; pushing you ever forward to reach the highest point you can. Giving you strength when you are tired, guiding you to the right path when you are lost, and being your console in the darkest of hours. It is because we honor them in our daily lives that they are with us, it is the reverence for who they were that binds us to them; and through them are not weakened to magic but strengthened as they reach across the void to protect us. You see it is not you that has become stronger in yourself; it is the strength of your connection to the ancestors that grows ever stronger allowing them to protect you from harm. When I was young my mother told me stories of a few of our kind who had spent their entire lives dedicating themselves to the past and to being great historians of our people. In time their link to our ancestors became so great that they could no longer be harmed by magic, as the ancestors' protection of them was almost divine. These Tson'Chi became known as the Ho'si, and became the voice of enlightenment in our society; they were true masters, able to channel the ancestors' chi not only as protection but as a weapon. The history of the Ho'si is extensive and to be honest is more than even I know, partly because they are so steeped in mystery due to their secretive nature. To know all there is you would need to devote your life to their endeavors; there is however a few things that you must know for it will define who you become. You see when the Ho'si began there were many of them, from all the clans, they would pilgrimage once every decade to deep within the earth where we began to pay homage to the oldest of our ancestors. They traveled to the Temple of Light, perhaps the oldest remaining link to who we were some 20,000 years ago; even to this day the temple exists though now it is hidden away so only Ho'si can find it. At one time the temple was not hidden and was a common

place of reverence for all our people; but then dark times came about and destroyed much of the Ho'si which leads me to the important lesson.

As you know it is our link to our past that strengthens our future, and the Ho'si had mastered such; but with such a tie the greatest of respect must be maintained and when it is not there is a wrath that descends upon you. I will tell you the story of the first Wu'gi sorcerer, but I warn you this is a tale of the darkest of our kind. Among the Ho'si there are many names of those that have achieved much and brought prosperity for our people but this is the story of a man known by Suri Disu of Clan Mong'fae, a most promising student. He spent his life an orphan of a bloody war with the Dark Dwarves, all of his family had been killed in a raid; being that the village were at the far edge of our lands it would take time before anyone in the kingdom would learn of what happened. The boy survived for months, wild almost feral living off the remnants of what was left in the rubble. The first to discover the horror was an elder by the name of Gui, a poet and a student of the Ho'si ways; when asked later he was to have said "I woke one morning and felt the call of our ancestors leading me to the village". The site was devastating the complete destruction of hundreds of people slaughtered, bodies left strewn about being fed upon by vermin, the stench overwhelming. Gui spent hours looking through the remains of the village knowing that he was brought here for something more than to witness death; and then heard movement from a husked building. He moved closer trying to bait out whatever lied in wait, as he approached the doorway the young boy sprang out wielding a blade. He blocked the strike and rolled away.

"Boy steady yourself I mean you no harm" he spoke as he sprang to his feet. The boy made no reply and lunged again. Gui wasted no time he countered and knocked the boy unconscious with his staff. He took the boys limp body and made a safe place for them to rest in the village. When the boy woke a few hours later Gui could tell he was scared, he offered him fresh water and food which the boy took cautiously and retreated to the corner of the room.

"It is okay child I will not hurt you; tell me what happened here, who did this?" he spoke softly as he drank his tea.

The boy finally spoke between frantic bites "Dwarves, they came with fire like demons, screaming everywhere, all I could do was hide, I am a coward." The boy stopped eating and began to cry.

Gui moved to console the boy "Sshhh, be still there is no shame in what you did. You are but a child no one would expect you to stand before trained soldiers to simply die. And had you not survived there would be no one to tell the story or to give those who died a voice for their efforts or valor." The boy finally caved and moved to Gui to be embraced. In hopes to give the boy some amount of peace he had to boy help him perform a burial ritual so that the dead could pass over and take their rightful place among the ancestors. Gui saw in the boy something very powerful, even though young and unskilled he was almost a natural in the ways and his chi was strong.

Gui would raise the child in the ways of the Ho'si and as his own child, as the boy matured and reached his age of passage he requested to be admitted to begin his tutelage under the Ho'si masters instead of going into the military as per tradition, such a request had never been made before or since. Gui was troubled but had faith that the ancestors would provide the answer and the path. Gui and Suri traveled to the grand court of the Tiger to make an unprecedented plea, and to the shock of many the request was not immediately denied; perhaps it was due to Gui's legacy. Tiger called for a tribunal of the clans to make a decision as this would set a precedence that could change their ways forever. It would take ten days for an answer to be given, and in their minds the leaders of our kind had laid a plan

they felt was unbreakable. Gui and Suri were called to the court and told that the boy would undergo three trials and should he succeed his plea would be granted. The first was the Trial of Steel, this is the last step of a soldier's training where they must combat both peers and masters until they fall it is a test of endurance and skill as they withstand a near endless wave of attackers. Suri pressed further than any soldier had ever gone, subduing a previously unbeaten general; the Trial was stopped before he reached the end. Gui reminded the court that the boy was holding to his end of the Trials, and that the court would honor him by allowing him to complete. The next was the Trial of Roses, Suri was to traverse a room, the floor was covered with a layer of rice paper and then by a layer of fresh rose petals; the objective was to cross the room without disturbing the petals or breaking the paper, while dodging arrows from the side; he was the fourth person in history to succeed. The court was astonished; even the most skilled of masters had failed this trial. For his final test Suri was to accomplish the near impossible, he was to perform an act that most Ho'si masters spend a millennium to perfect; he was to perform the Wu'gi-shanu, or Void Walk. When a Ho'si master performs this act he channels his chi into the nether and crosses into the Void, the place where all dead reside. This task was truly set to defeat him, as many unskilled had tried before; some had perished unable to control the back flow of negative chi that separates our worlds and some had simply become lost in the Void unable to find their way back. Gui asked for one hour for the boy to prepare, this was granted. Gui took Suri to a quiet room in the palace to prepare him.

"What they have asked you to do is meant for you to fail; but you see they do not know what I know of you and that will be your success." Gui spoke as he lit incense and laid out a small mat.

"Master what do you mean? I have done much but that is more than I am able to push my chi to do, I... I am scared." The boy sat as his hands trembled.

"You are scared? Yet I saw no fear or doubt in your other trials why would you doubt now? There are things Suri that I have not told you but now I think you are ready to know the truth. You think you do not have the skill to crossover but you do as you have before you just did not know it. How do you think you managed to hide and survive from the dwarves, when they destroyed and burned every building? Had another come to the city before me I doubt they would have found you because not everyone can see across the void. You had stepped across not completely but enough that you were hidden from the view of most." Gui continued to prep the area setting out small carvings and gems.

Suri sat there in shock, "But how, how could I have done that?"

"After all you have seen and done and yet you still do not fully grasp that? It is because of your ancestors, your bond to them is almost unlike any I have encountered. That blessing allows you to use their chi and to walk the void. There will be time to teach you more but for now you need to be still in your thoughts and search out that place you hid. You see the council is wise but they are not Ho'si; so they will not be able to tell if you have fully crossed the void or if you have only gone part way through. When the time comes, focus on your past, find that place inside of you and focus your chi and you will make it." For the rest of the hour Gui and Suri meditated in preparation.

When the hour was up they returned to the main palace hall for the final trial; this time though there was a new face well new to Suri. Gui paused for a moment and then pushed Suri forward. "Focus you will make it." He did not tell Suri that the new face was a Ho'si master, and at this point it would only hinder the boy's performance.

"When you are ready." Tiger spoke and the room set still. Suri stepped to the middle of the room, placed a mat on the floor and knelt. For several minutes he chanted in whispers and sought the focus he needed, and then it happened he vanished. Gui looked at

the other Ho'si hoping he did not look carefully, the master was awe struck; Gui became confused and focused on the boys mat. He too became stunned, the boy was not half way he had crossed fully over; it was amazing. After only a few minutes the boy returned to the palace room, he was changed he seemed to have a new vigor to him.

"I have defeated your tests, you will honor my plea." The boy demanded. Tiger was taken aback the boy showed no respect in his words; however he had in fact just done the impossible. There was but a pause, and tiger spoke.

"On this day the ancestors have truly blessed and rewarded your devotion, you may begin your study with the Ho'si." With that the council left and Suri was dismissed. Suri and Gui returned to their chambers.

"Tell me what happened, I mean you stepped all the way across." Gui asked in wonder.

"To be honest I am not fully sure, I did as you said and as I pushed my chi out trying to hide, it felt like I was being pulled so I went." The boy had an odd calm to him. In truth he had made it across with help thought it would be many years later before what helped would become clear. Suri and Gui traveled to the Ho'si temple so he could begin his training, though really at this point he had passed most students. He would make his climb in the order in a tenth the time of the greatest masters, he was a born chi master; this brought him fame from most and distrust from elders. They worried that there was no balance to his overwhelming aptitude it just seemed too good to be true. After only three hundred years as a Ho'si Suri had attained the prized designation of master, and was granted the chance to learn the secrets of the Wu'gi-shanu. Suri would spend weeks at a time locked away practicing and perfecting the walk, now while the great master knew how they rarely crossed over often; Suri on the other hand was not only going in and out of the void he began to spend large amounts of time in the void. This began to worry the elders and with good cause, we are not of the void and as such we are not designed to survive there as it can take a toll on one's body and spirit; the elders had noticed a growing change in him not only physically but the negative chi of the void lingered on him. The elders would call Suri to the hall where they would forbid him from crossing the void again or he would be removed from the Ho'si. It was in this act that the balance was unveiled; he turned violent speaking of some other entity that had warned him of the elder's jealousy.

"All this time you have doubted me, and now that I have done what none among you has; you have all turned against us. No more will I tolerate your insolence, the Ho'si will be mine I will guide them to the true power they are capable of." With that shui, negative chi, began to seep from his skin and swirl around him, he attacked the elders striking at them with magic, inverting the cycle; he had turned away from his ancestors and become warped from the void. The elders were not only unprepared for the assault but were also not strong enough to resist Suri's chi, with both magic and fist he laid waste to the greatest of the Ho'si elders and killed hundreds students before fleeing the temple.

It would come to light in time that for many years Suri had been practicing the darkest of arts and he had become tainted by necromancy; such acts betrayed his ancestors and incurred their wrath though it did not stop him it only spitted him and he drew in the shadow. In the wake of his devastation of the temple and the grip of the shui upon his magic, all but thirteen elders were lost to the beyond forever. Their souls were never allowed to rest in their rightful place and our kind lost many that would be ancestors.

## **The Art of War**

Written by the hand of Orin' Takagi

War is not the goal nor the destination but an unavoidable obstacle on the road to peace. No matter to which lands you travel you will find this truth to be most evident, that in no world is there a man that does not know the chilled bite of oppression and war. For even the peaceful farmer is at war, there is always another man who would seek his fertile land for himself, and it is because of this we fight. Much like a sword, if it is not crafted until you need to defend yourself, then it is too late and you will fall. It is better to have the tools of war ready at a moment's notice and never need to take them up than to not have them at all. It is in this life that our traditions match, not only does a strong military ward off those that might attack us but it also gives us security that should it happen we will be ready to strike down the threat. As you grow you will learn much but there are some lessons that must be remembered above all others, honor is not given it is earned; and that your family and your kin have died to ensure you have lived and it is your duty to those past and those to come to defend our ways.

## **The Lotus and Knife Festival**

Told by Minsu Kodi, 7<sup>th</sup> Tson'Chi Princess

While many cultures have their rules and methods as to how people find love and the one they will marry and be with for their life; we are much the same though we do not see it as just this life but the ever after as well. Some races and cultures look for certain attributes in their mates as do we but when it comes to a lord choosing a mate to lead his clan he is not looking for just any young woman. He is looking for the perfect specimen of our kind, one that not only exemplifies beauty but has mastery of martial skills as well; for the role of a clans princess is to be an icon for all women to strive to be.

The festival is an event that only happens once every couple of millennia as the lordship of the clans does not change hands often. Even then, the would be lord of a clan does not choose a wife until he has taken his place on the throne; he lives his life in servitude of the people forbidden to take a wife or have a mate until he is crowned lord. To many outside our culture this seems cruel that one would have to wait for an unknown time to come where he could find his one; but to be born into the royal line is to be born into a station of honor and devotion to the people. The other major difference for us is that it is not like some human kingdom where royalty weds royalty; in fact it is the opposite. Tson'Chi princesses are chosen from the common man so to speak; when a new lord is crowned all eligible girls from the next province are given the chance to try out for the festival. There is a series of short trials they must endure and even then only one hundred girls are chosen to participate in the festivals competitions. While the hope of all girls is to become the next princess it is a great honor to even complete for the chance. The festival is far more than just a pageant where the victor is crowned, it is a celebration of that our people have been and will be. It is a week where the toils of normal life come to a stop and Tson'Chi everywhere celebrate with food and wine with relatives; where we stop and pay homage to our ancestors and praise the great spirits for the gifts they have given us in this life.

For the first four days of the festival there are four different events that each girl must take part in, each of the events is overseen by the clans elder council and the newly crowned lord. The events cover an array of areas; beauty, knowledge, hand to hand

combat, and martial combat. During the week the lord does not speak with any of the contestants nor does he know their names, it is tradition that she be chosen on her actions not any merit of who she is. From the first four days of competition only twenty girls are chosen to compete in the Jinji on the sixth day. The Jinji is the final test for the girls; it tests all of their abilities, there is a series of hidden puzzles that they must find and solve all while traversing difficult terrain and avoiding or overcoming dangerous creatures that have been placed in the zone. Unlike the other contests this one pits the girls in direct odds with each other, often resulting in confrontation and combat; when a combatant is incapacitated they are removed from the event. In the end the first to solve all the puzzles and find the ceremonial dagger will become the victor and be crowned.

On the last day of the festival the lord and the new princess are wed in the way of our people, and for the first time the lord learns the name of his bride and is able to speak to her. While to many this would seem odd as most of our people meet and get to know our mates long before we wed, but it is believed that choosing in this fashion is actually the hands of our ancestors making the perfect match for those that lead us.