

## **Dwarven Culture and History**

One of the most common misconceptions about Dwarves is that they live in huge underground cities. This is actually a misrepresentation of the facts. Most Dwarves actually live in large communities, called "Kraals", near the entrances to their mines, high on the peaks of the "WXYZ MOUNTAIN RANGE". The kraals support the work that goes on deep within the heart of the mountains. It is also true that most kraals have underground halls adjoining the main public halls and meeting places, but for the most part, private residences are essentially large cabins that extend underground, into the mountainside only about 100 to 300 feet. These Burrowhalls, as they are known, will often contain several families. Some line of relationship is common in these Burrowhalls, as extended families grow, and children are born, and grandchildren get married, etc. It is not uncommon for five or more generations to live within the same Burrowhall.

To further confuse the average person about Dwarves living in underground cities is the existence of the Arstaadt, or "Work Town". Arstaadts do resemble cities and are very deep under ground. They are even continuously inhabited, for the most part. However, they are not permanent residences for most families. An Arstaadt is in essence a base camp for the many mining operations that occur within the largest of the mines.

An Arstaadt is usually about a full day's walk into a mine entrance. A group of workers will leave their Kraal and arrive in an Arstaadt late in the day. They will then claim one or more of the many permanent buildings at the compound, and live in the Arstaadt for up to a month. From the Arstaadt, they will make the relatively short walk to the mine they will be working, and spend a long, hard day mining. After their allotted month, they will then pack their gear, and head for their Kraal, only to be replaced another group of miners who will pick up where they left off. It is common for several Kraals to be connected to a single Arstaadt, and likewise several Arstaadts to be connected to a single Kraal. Some Arstaadts even connect to other Arstaadts. Thus completing a very complex network of tunnels and mines that create the Dwarven nations.

The aspiration of all Dwarves is to work closely with the mountains that spawned them. Anything that deals with rock or ore, and the sweat of one's brow is considered to be a respectable career. The Dwarven craftsmen are known for the extremely high quality of their work, and the quality of their weapons is nearly legendary. Mining, stone carving, and especially smithing, are considered to be occupations suitable to the highest caste in dwarven society.

At the other end of the spectrum in Dwarven society, are the lumberjacks, farmers, and shepherds. These professions take the Dwarf far down the mountainsides, below the peaks. There, these hard working Dwarves set up seasonal base camps called "Steadings". Weekly trips are necessary to keep the Kraals, and in turn the Arstaadts, in supply of various essential goods. These trips happen more and more often and the steadings are usually abandoned as winter nears. Stockpiles of food and wood must make it to the Kraals before blizzards choke the mountain passes until the spring thaw. It is understood that these jobs are very difficult and are essential for any society to survive. The truth of the matter, however, is that most Dwarves feel that working so far from the mountain tops makes one, somehow, less of a Dwarf.

Serving as a middle-class are the Dwarven Craftsmen. Any Dwarf who makes something is deemed respectable. Carpenters, cooks, and brew masters are all considered to be decent, quality folks. There are very few limits on who belongs this particular class; even poets and tinkerers are considered craftsmen. The vast majority of Dwarves are considered to be craftsmen.

Only slightly less revered than miners and their ilk are the dwarven warriors, who have a caste system of their own. At the top of this sub-culture are the so-called "Grey Beards". These warriors are the oldest of warriors and have earned this nom de clure by virtue of their long, flowing grey beards. They invariably have experienced multitudes of combats and battles, both in the deepest mines of the Dwarven Kingdoms, as well as fighting in the bloodiest of surface battles. These veterans of many wars have earned respect simply by surviving. They are recognized by all races as foemen worthy of honor, and bring fame to their families and clans. Usually, a Grey Beard will carry a Runeweapon, bestowed upon him by his King after a very special ceremony

In order for a warrior to earn the status of Grey Beard, he must have officially be recognized by a king, a Runesmith, or a High Priest (all of which will be explained later). He also has served as a "Iron Breaker". These extremely courageous Dwarves serve in an Arstaadt for long Periods of time, often a year or more per tour of duty. While serving as a an iron breaker, if a Dwarf distinguishes himself in some way to his brothers in arms, they will nominate him for acceptance into the ranks of the Grey Beards. The nominations are then reviewed by a King, a High Priest, and/or a Runesmith. If it is deemed that the individual is deserving, and he has enough experience (as shown by his whiskers), then a very special ceremony is held, and he is welcomed into the ranks of the Grey Beards. It is also possible for a Grey Beard to nominate an "Iron Breaker" for elevation, but this is relatively uncommon. It is the job of the Iron Breakers to protect the workers in the deepest of mines from the horrors that are found there. The most ancient of Dwarven mines are said to be possessed of the most evil and malevolent spirits known. It is said that in the bowels of the earth, near the raw primal forces of the planet, the link between this world and others are more tenuous, and powerful beings are able to break through into our world. These creatures allegedly include demons, wraiths, devils, elementals, and such. Every clan must place ten, and only ten, male members of their collective families in the service of the Iron Breakers.

Currently, there are ten Dwarven Kingdoms: Heaven's Pillar, Grenklin's Peak, Steel Mountain, Cloud Mane, Karkif Mountain, Blood Cliffs, Axeback Ridge, Fire Peak, Mount Blizzard, and Thunder's Anvil Peak. There is almost no animosity between any of the kingdoms, and all will respond if one is threatened. There is, on the other hand, great competition between the kingdoms in almost all aspects of life. Dwarven Games are held every year, and medals and trophies are awarded. Honors are bestowed for the best ales, and breweries. Riches are weighed regularly to see which kingdom can mine the most and Dwarven Maidens are always cooking to see who can cook the best. This is seen as the biggest reason for the Dwarves' records being so difficult to follow, because whichever kingdom is declared the over-all winner of a year is allowed to name the following year. For example, between the 18th year of Karif Mountain and 19th year of Karif Mountain, there are 27 years as follows: The 8th-10th years of Blood Cliffs, the 27th year of Axeback Ridge, the 11th- 15th years of Blood Cliffs, the 1st-4th years of Mount Blizzard, the 15th year of Cloud Mane, the 16th year of Steel Mountain, the 37th and 38th year of Karkif Mountain, the 4th-8th years of Thunder's Anvil Peak, and the 28th year of Axeback Ridge. As you can see, from a historians' standpoint, this system is horrendous!

It has been more than **1500** years since the Dwarven kingdoms have been under the rule of a single King. His name was Forlok Rippenrender. Forlok was a Grey Beard who wielded a legendary Rune weapon called "Dwarves' Vengeance". He served well and bravely for 87 years. He, along with a whole company of Grey Beards and five companies of Iron Breakers, was lost after he launched a campaign against a Demon Lord who tried to claim the mines below Heaven's Pillar as his new domain. The Demon Lord was named Ragnoth, and is assumed to have killed all of the Dwarves in question. These mines are now habited and prosperous and the kingdom was saved, but none of Forlok's party has ever been heard from again. Stories abound, however about strange things and sounds coming from the deepest of these mines, and three Arstaadts now stand empty. Legend says

that Forlok led his companies into the bowels of Hades to save the entire world from destruction. There is still some degree of honor in having a kin who participated in the "March of Demon's Death" campaign, as it has come to be known.

Of all things in the Dwarf's history, the Great Betrayal is the blackest time in their history. The time of the Great Betrayal dates back to the earliest of Dwarven records. Some races have been heard to joke that this is the whole reason Dwarves started keeping records in the first place. No one outside of the Dwarven race knows or remembers what exactly happened, but all Dwarves are taught from an early age that Elves are not to be trusted. At the time, the Dwarven Kingdoms were coming together under a single ruler for the first time. There was a meeting of all of the Dwarven Lords at Cloud Mane to moot over the possibility of uniting as a single kingdom. The meeting had gone on for nearly eleven months, and there was little doubt that all the Lords would vote for unification under the great Runelord, Krameel Ironfist. Krameel's two sons, Gundok and Varthok, were there, serving as bodyguards and witnesses. Word came from the newly encountered Elven Kingdom that an Orcish raiding fleet was about to make landfall at SpirePoint, an Elven settlement.

The Dwarves had encountered the Orcs on numerous occasions and quickly decided to go and "have a bash at the greenskins" as the records state. The brothers were given command as a sign of honor to Krameel. This action essentially stated that the Congress of Lords had decided to king the old Runesmith, and little was left to be done except for the details. The brothers gathered a small army within the day, and left on a fast paced march to the coast the next morning. For a day and a night and then another whole day the Dwarves marched. They arrived in Spire point, but were too late to do anything for the defense of the town. The survivors indicated however that the raiders were headed to the East and worried that the cities of Ocean Breeze, and Romlin's Bay were in danger. After a short rest, the Dwarves again forced a march. For another night and day they marched. They met with a force of Elves led by Trellin the Fierce, an Elven arch-mage. A plan was made where-by Gundok, the elder brother, would lead two-thirds of the dwarves toward Ocean Breeze, the more likely target of the Orcs. Trellin would take his smaller band of elven warriors and defend Romlin's Bay, but ready to run to Ocean Breeze if, and when, the raiders were spotted. Varthok would take the other third of the dwarven force and wait half way between the two cities ready to bolster either force. An elven runner was sent with each dwarven contingent and take word to the appropriate place when needed.

The unexpected happened next when the Orcs landed nearest to Varthok, by far the weakest of the fronts. The Elven runner placed with Varthok had to make the decision on whom to carry the word to, and chose Trellin, his own leader. Even though the small force of Dwarves fought bravely to defend a foreign land against the invaders, it was soon obvious that they were overmatched. They had almost no time to organize any kind of defense, and no place from which to defend. In open plain combat the Orcs were easily superior warriors.

The elven runner who was placed with Varthok carried word to Trellin even as Dwarves died. The elves ran hard to aid Varthok force, but with every step, Dwarves died. Trellin's force got to the site of the battle and he took a moment to assess the situation as Dwarves died. He made the decision to send another runner around the combat to carry word to Gundok, and waited to strike until the two forces could coordinate and attack the Orcs from two sides simultaneously. All the while, Dwarves died.

When Gundok finally arrived at the battlefield, he saw the elven force waiting and watching as Dwarves died. Enraged, he immediately attacked to Orcs, and tried to save his brother, whose tiny remaining force was grossly outnumbered and being quickly overwhelmed. Trellin was equally furious that the Dwarf made no attempt to co-ordinate with him, but gained composure and sallied to

join the melee. The battle quickly turned to chaos. From his position, Trelin could see Gundok's squat form carving a path through the invaders with his huge battle-axe, but it was easy to see that he was being quickly surrounded. He decided to try and cast a spell that would cause the Dwarf to become invigorated and fight with the ferocity of a lion. What he didn't realize was that Dwarves had an unusual resistance to magic. The spell fizzled as it struck the Dwarven warrior, but it did have one effect: It took Gundok's attention from the foes around him. That was all that was needed. It took only one brief moment for an Orcish invader to kill the elder brother.

The battle ended with the invaders being easily repulsed, but the damage had been done. The two heirs to the newly formed Dwarven throne lay dead. A dis-spirited Dwarven force quickly and quietly gathered to return home. All had seen the treachery of the Elves, and none would ever forget it. Furthermore, they vowed that none of their prodigy would ever forget it. This was the beginning to the Great Book of Grudges, and The War against the Elves soon ensued. Luckily, Krameel survived late into life, and produced a third son, Brimstok, and the lineage was restored for many, many generations.

There are numerous other incidences in Dwarven history, and some even changed the future of some of the kingdoms, but most are told by word of mouth, and a great tradition exists of story telling. Most of the other races, however think that the Dwarven epics are just plain boastful, and more than slightly exaggerated. Don't ever mention that to a Dwarf, though, as his ancestors undoubtedly made him what he is today.

Average natural lifespan: 150 years.