

Lore

The Sundering: A Cataclysm of Ages



The **Sundering** isn't just a historical event; it's the foundational trauma of Aethelgard, shaping its magic, its geography, and its very cultures. It was a singular, devastating magical cataclysm that occurred roughly **2000 years ago**, tearing at the fabric of reality itself.

Before the Sundering, Aethelgard was dominated by powerful, magically advanced civilizations, primarily elven and ancient human empires, who harnessed raw arcane energies with unprecedented skill. Their magic was grand, almost god-like, manipulating ley lines and weaving the very essence of creation. Other races, like the dwarves were kept to their homelands, mainly in the mountains, and crafted incredible cities, items and artifacts from rock and ore. Orcs, who before the Sundering were at the height of their power, were brought low, forced to watch their vast empire crumble to dust.

The effects of the Sundering were so severe that for many centuries, life existed on the fringes of survival. While many races survived, millions died and it took countless generations before civilization could rebuild.

The prevailing theory among scholars is that the Sundering was caused by:

- **The Hubris of the Arcanists:** Many believe it was the direct result of unchecked magical ambition. The great Arch-Weavers of now-forgotten empires, perhaps seeking to ascend to divinity or to master extra-planar travel, attempted a ritual of unfathomable power. They aimed to merge planes, or perhaps tap into the primordial source of magic itself, but instead, they unleashed a chaotic force that ripped through Aethelgard.
- **The Reckoning of the Gods:** A less common, but equally terrifying, theory suggests the Sundering was a divine punishment. The sheer scale of magical manipulation by mortals angered the cosmic entities or ancient spirits that governed reality, leading them to strike back and "reset" the world in a violent outburst of power.
- **A Collision of Planes:** Some esoteric scholars posit that Aethelgard might have unknowingly drifted too close to another powerful plane of existence, or a dimensional barrier simply failed. The immense magical pressures and conflicting realities caused the sudden, violent rupture.

The Immediate Aftermath:

- **Geographical Scars:** Entire mountain ranges were shattered, oceans boiled and receded, and vast forests were transmuted into desolate wastes or bizarre, warped landscapes (like parts of the Mires of Despair).
- **Magic Unbound:** While magic existed before, the Sundering made it wilder, more unpredictable. Ley lines were fractured, creating areas of surging arcane energy, dead zones, and the "Astral Veil" phenomena. New, volatile forms of magic emerged, often tied to the chaotic remnants of the cataclysm.
- **Societal Collapse:** The vast empires crumbled overnight. Knowledge was lost, populations were decimated, and the surviving races were flung into a dark age, struggling to adapt to a broken world. Many ancient magical artifacts and texts were either destroyed or buried in the chaos, waiting to be rediscovered.
- **The Rise of Monstrosities:** The raw, unfiltered magical energy and planar distortions gave birth to new, terrifying creatures or mutated existing ones beyond recognition. These "Sundered Beasts" now haunt the most warped parts of Aethelgard.

Echoes of Grandeur: Pre-Sundering Civilizations

Before the Sundering, Aethelgard was a tapestry of magnificent, highly advanced civilizations. Their achievements in magic, architecture, and philosophy were legendary, far surpassing anything known in the current age.

- **The Eldoria Imperium (Ancient Elves):** Dwelling primarily in sprawling cities woven into the very forests of what is now the Verdant Reach and in crystalline spires that rose above the Cragspire Peaks, the Eldorians were masters of **natural and elemental magic**. Their mages could coax life from stone, command the winds, and channel the raw energy of the earth itself. They achieved a state of serene, almost eternal existence through communion with the world's ley lines. Their cities were living architecture, grown from colossal trees or sculpted from mountainsides,

powered by a network of resonant crystals. Their downfall was swift and catastrophic during the Sundering; many of their grand structures crumbled or were consumed by wild magic, leaving behind haunting ruins now overgrown or claimed by nature.

- **The Solarian Dominion (Ancient Humans):** Centered in the sun-baked lands that are now the Whisperwind Wastes, the Solarians were renowned for their **astral and divine magic**. They worshipped celestial bodies and drew power from constellations, building vast observatories and pyramids that reached for the heavens. Their priests and seers were said to be able to glimpse destiny, and their war-mages could call down meteoric fire or command solar flares. Their society was highly structured, governed by star-priests and philosopher-kings. The Sundering warped their lands into a desolate desert, burying most of their golden cities and libraries beneath endless sands, leaving behind only tantalizing hints of their advanced cosmology.
- **The Deep-Forged Holds (Dwarves and Gnomes):** While not an empire in the same sense, the dwarves and gnomes had extensive, interconnected underground city-states beneath the Cragspire Peaks. They mastered **runic magic and geomancy**, imbuing objects with powerful enchantments and drawing energy directly from the earth's core. Their craftsmanship was legendary, creating artifacts of immense power and durability. During the Sundering, their deepholds, while often protected by powerful wards, experienced violent tremors and breaches, unleashing subterranean horrors. Many holds were lost or sealed, their treasures and knowledge entombed.

Now, however, the world is no longer divided in the same sense. The races of Aethelgard no longer live in their own, separate empires. They all live together, in kingdoms and countries, where races matters less than it did thousands of years ago, and the banner under which you stand matters more. Cities like Veridia looks more elven, than human, for instance, but that is because it was founded by elves a long time ago. All races are welcome, and that goes for almost all kingdoms, towns and cities. There are, however, always exceptions to the rule.

The only race that might be an exception are the orcs. They ruled a vast, powerful empire before the Sundering, but ever since they have survived in clans. They have built only a few cities, preferring to live in smaller groups, closely together. Some say that there are voices among them that seek to rebuild their old empire, but is there anyone out there strong enough to unite them?

The Fabric of Power: Evolution of Magic

Magic in Aethelgard is fundamentally different since the Sundering. It's less predictable, more primal, and infused with the echoes of the cataclysm.

- **Wild Magic & Arcane Scars:** The Sundering left behind "Arcane Scars" – areas where reality is thin, and raw magic bleeds through from other planes or from the chaotic void. These places can be beautiful but dangerous, prone to surges of wild

magic, unexpected transmutations, or spontaneous elemental phenomena.

Adventurers with magic must learn to respect these zones.

- **Elemental Imbalance:** The balance of the fundamental elements (earth, air, fire, water) was severely disrupted. Certain regions might have an overabundance of one element, leading to perpetual storms, volcanic activity, or unyielding blights. This creates unique environmental challenges and opportunities for those attuned to elemental magic.
- **Planar Contamination:** The tearing of the Astral Veil during the Sundering allowed minute (and sometimes not so minute) amounts of planar essence to seep into Aethelgard. This has led to the emergence of creatures with extra-planar traits (like Tieflings and Dragonborn being more common than before, or entirely new monstrous species). It also means that magic can sometimes draw from these foreign energies, leading to unpredictable results.
- **Focus on Channeling, Not Creation:** Modern magic-users don't typically "create" spells from pure will like the Arch-Weavers of old. Instead, they learn to **channel** and **manipulate** the existing magical currents, often relying on rituals, verbal components, and rare reagents to focus the chaotic energies. This makes magic a more arduous, though still incredibly potent, pursuit.
- **Fragmented Knowledge:** Much of the ancient knowledge of magic was lost. Modern mages are often archaeologists of lore, piecing together fragments from ruined libraries or deciphering cryptic glyphs to rediscover forgotten spells and techniques.

Geography

The Kingdom of Atheria

Veridia is a vital gateway city within the **Kingdom of Atheria**, a steadfast realm that embodies an impressive resilience and capacity for rebuilding in the post-Sundering world. Atheria sprawls across the western and central portions of the **Verdant Reach**, a region known for its fertile lands, ancient forests, and abundant rivers.

- **Foundation & History:** Atheria was founded centuries after the Sundering by elven survivors and refugees who slowly coalesced around emerging strongholds. Its origins lie in the determined efforts of early rulers and wise elders who sought to establish order and reclaim lost knowledge. Unlike the pre-Sundering Eldoria, Atheria emphasizes a more grounded form of leadership, focusing on practical governance, strong military defense, and fostering trade to ensure prosperity. Its history is marked by periods of conflict with encroaching monstrous creatures from the Mires of Despair, and the odd conflict or skirmish with a neighboring kingdom.
- **Governance:** Atheria is a **monarchy**, currently ruled by the **Kingly House of Valerius**. King Theron Valerius XV, a pragmatic and cautious leader, sits on the throne in the capital city of **Silverhaven**. While the King holds ultimate authority, his rule is guided by a council of respected nobles, guild masters, and a small conclave

of the realm's most trusted mages. The kingdom's laws are strict but generally just, prioritizing stability and the welfare of its populace.

- **Culture & Society:** Atherian society values hard work, communal defense, and tradition. Farmers are highly respected, as are soldiers and artisans. While magic is accepted, especially within the context of the Arcane Guilds, it's viewed with a degree of cautious reverence, a direct consequence of the Sundering's historical impact. Public displays of raw, uncontrolled magic are frowned upon. Education is valued, particularly in practical skills, history, and the study of lesser-known arcane principles. Festivals often center around harvest, seasonal changes, and commemorating victories against threats.
- **Military:** The **Royal Guard of Atheria** is a well-trained and disciplined force, primarily focused on border patrol, protecting trade routes, and maintaining order within cities like Veridia. They are equipped with sturdy steel armor and weapons, often enchanted with basic protective or enhancing runes crafted by Atherian artificers. While not as magically advanced as the pre-Sundering empires, they understand the threats of the wild places and are capable of facing mutated beasts and brigands alike.
- **Economy:** Atheria's economy is robust, driven by its rich agricultural output, extensive trade networks along the Whisperflow River and land routes, and valuable timber from its forests. Veridia, positioned at the nexus of several trade routes, acts as a critical economic artery for the kingdom, connecting the Verdant Reach with goods from the Cragspire Peaks.
- **Current Challenges:** Despite its stability, Atheria faces several challenges:
 - **The Mires' Creep:** The Mires of Despair are slowly expanding, threatening agricultural lands and trade routes in the east.
 - **Resource Disputes:** Increasing tensions with some dwarven clans over mining rights in the foothills of the Cragspire Peaks.
 - **Whispers of Ancient Evils:** King Theron and his council are becoming increasingly concerned by reports of unusual magical activity and strange cult-like movements emerging from isolated areas. They've been subtly increasing patrols and sending out scouts to investigate, but openly acknowledging the threats could cause widespread panic.

Veridia: The Crossroads City

Veridia is a vibrant, somewhat precarious hub where the remnants of various cultures intermingle. It lies nestled in a broad valley where the fertile lands of the Verdant Reach begin to give way to the foothills of the Cragspire Peaks. This strategic position makes it a vital trade city, but also a place where disparate interests often collide.

- **Appearance & Atmosphere:** Veridia is a city of mismatched architecture. Newer, sturdy stone buildings stand alongside older structures that hint at pre-Sundering origins. The air hums with the clatter of commerce, the shouts of vendors, and the occasional chime of a minor arcane ward being activated. It's generally well-lit,

particularly in the market districts, but side alleys and the docks can be shadowy and dangerous.

- **Key Districts/Areas:**

- **The Market:** The beating heart of Veridia. This sprawling open-air market is a chaotic symphony of sights, sounds, and smells. Here, merchants from the Verdant Reach sell their produce, dwarven traders from the Cragspire Peaks offer rare minerals and crafted goods, and even a few cloaked figures from the Whisperwind Wastes might be seen bartering for esoteric components. It's a prime spot for information gathering – or pickpocketing.
- **The Arcane Quarter (The Spire Quarter):** Dominating a section of the city are several repurposed ancient structures – fragmented spires of gleaming, smooth stone that somehow survived the Sundering. These are now home to the city's most prominent mages, the Arcane Guilds, and the largest public library, **The Scholarium**. The air among the peaks of the spires often crackles faintly with residual magic. It's a place of learning and power, but also of old secrets.
- **The Guild Pits:** A grittier district near the city gates and older fortifications. This is where most of Veridia's adventuring guilds, mercenary companies, and less reputable organizations have their bases. Taverns like **The Gilded Griffon** (a common meeting spot) or **The Broken Blade** (for those seeking shadier contacts) are abundant. This area is often loud, boisterous, and prone to brawls.
- **The Merchant's Wharf:** Built along the Whisperflow River that eventually winds its way to the Verdant Reach's inner kingdoms. Goods arrive and depart by river barge, making it a bustling area filled with dockhands, shipwrights, and the occasional smuggler. The Perpetual Crane, an ancient, magically animated crane, is a local wonder, said to have survived the Sundering.

- **Current State & Dangers:** Veridia is generally peaceful, but tensions are rising. An increase in strange disappearances, unusually aggressive mutated creatures emerging from the nearby foothills, and a growing presence of a secretive **"Collector's Guild"** (who seem overly interested in rare magical trinkets and individuals with unusual arcane signatures) are making the populace uneasy.

The Gods

The Twelve Prime Gods of Aethelgard

The gods of Aethelgard are not distant myths; their influence is woven into the very reality of the world, though often subtly in the post-Sundering age. Many were profoundly affected by the Sundering, either weakened, fragmented, or forced into a more distant slumber. Mortals interpret their will through divine magic, omens, and the enduring natural laws they embody.

The Sundering's Echo on Divinity: While the ultimate cause of the Sundering is debated, many scholars and priests are certain that it shattered reality, but also fragmented much of

the gods' direct influence, leaving them to recover and re-establish their presence in a broken world.

1. Eldrin, The Luminous Sovereign (God of Light, Order, and Creation)



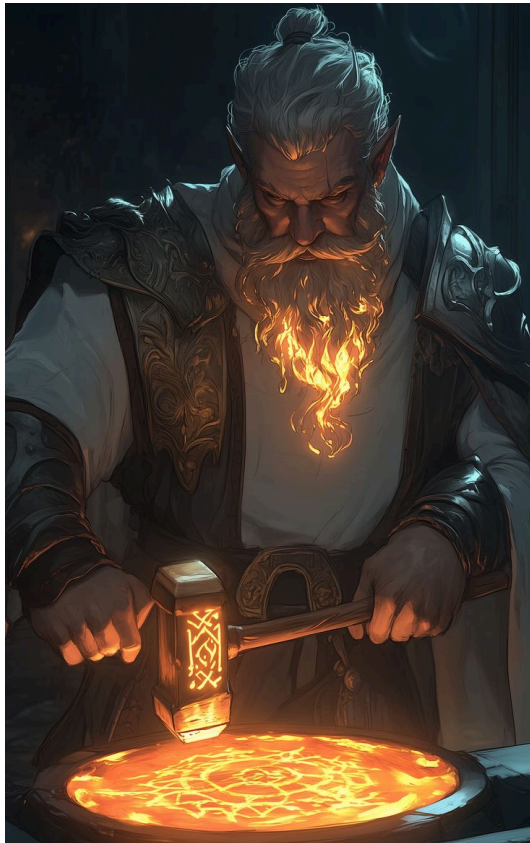
- **Domain:** Light, justice, law, healing, hope, divine magic, civilization, day.
 - **Description:** Eldrin embodies pure light and celestial order. Before the Sundering, Eldrin's influence was potent, guiding the **Solarian Dominion** as its prime deity, and inspiring grand acts of creation. Post-Sundering, Eldrin's power is less overt, radiating as a persistent beacon of hope against the pervasive darkness. His followers strive to rebuild, protect the innocent, and banish corruption. His light now represents a constant struggle against the lingering shadow of the Sundering.
 - **Symbol:** A radiant sunburst.
-

2. Lyra, The Verdant Weaver (Goddess of Nature, Life, and Growth)



- **Domain:** Forests, rivers, fertility, wild places, natural healing, animals, agriculture, spring, earth.
 - **Description:** Lyra is the nurturing spirit of Aethelgard's natural world. Before the Sundering, she blessed the **Eldoria Imperium**, overseeing bountiful harvests and the gentle balance of the wild. Her presence ensures the renewal of life even in the face of despair. She is fierce in protecting nature but gentle in her touch, advocating for harmony. Her power manifests strongly in the **Verdant Reach**, but weakly in the **Mires of Despair**.
 - **Symbol:** A winding vine with a single, perfect leaf, or an intricate knot of roots.
-

3. Kael, The Deep Forge (God of Craft, Stone, and Resilience)



- **Domain:** Craftsmanship, mining, metalwork, engineering, endurance, mountains, wealth, law (earth-bound).
 - **Description:** Kael embodies the unyielding strength of stone and the meticulous patience of the artisan. He is the patron of all who work with their hands and minds to create lasting things. His followers value hard work, tradition, and the hidden riches of the earth. He is seen as the enduring foundation of society. He now guides his followers to reclaim lost holds and reinforce existing ones, teaching them to endure.
 - **Symbol:** A stylized hammer striking an anvil, or a rune carved into solid rock.
-

4. Umbra, The Shifting Veil (Deity of Secrets, Illusions, and the Night)



- **Domain:** Shadows, mystery, stealth, trickery, twilight, dreams, hidden knowledge, the unknown.
 - **Description:** Umbra is a mysterious, enigmatic deity, neither inherently good nor evil, but representing the necessary balance of darkness to light, of what is hidden to what is revealed. Umbra encourages observation, adaptability, and the pursuit of truths that lie beneath the surface. Scholars seeking forgotten lore or rogues navigating the underworld often pay homage. Umbra's domain, the **Astral Veil**, was violently torn during the Sundering, paradoxically giving Umbra's influence a new, chaotic potency as more of the "unknown" spilled into reality. Umbra understands the nature of the void better than most, seeing it as another layer of the universe's mystery rather than just pure destruction.
 - **Symbol:** A hooded figure, a crescent moon, or three intertwined serpents.
-

5. Vaelor, The Stormheart (God of War, Courage, and Passion)



- **Domain:** War, honorable combat, courage, strength, storms, ambition, righteous fury.
- **Description:** Vaelor is the thunderous embodiment of battle and the fierce spirit of defiance. He champions the courageous and the bold, urging his followers to stand firm against tyranny and threat. Vaelor respects skill and strategy, but above all, the willingness to face danger head-on. His presence is still felt in the wild storms that sweep Aethelgard, and he inspires warriors to face the encroaching horrors and defend their homes. He encourages the necessary conflicts that lead to growth and protection.
- **Symbol:** A clenched gauntlet holding a lightning bolt, or crossed swords.

6. Morwen, The Silent Guide (Goddess of Death, Memory, and Transition)



- **Domain:** Death, memory, ancestors, rites of passage, the unseen journey, stillness, endings.
 - **Description:** Morwen is the solemn guardian of souls and the keeper of all that has passed. She is not a deity of destruction, but of the inevitable cycle of life and death, guiding spirits to their final rest and preserving the echoes of memory. Her silence is comforting to those who understand the peace of oblivion, and her wisdom comes from knowing all stories. The Sundering created countless sudden, violent deaths, and tore at the veil between life and death. Morwen works tirelessly to mend these spiritual wounds, ensuring that the deceased find their way and that the horrors born of the Sundering do not corrupt the natural cycle of passing. She stands as a bulwark against the Void's desire to consume all reality, including the peace of death.
 - **Symbol:** A skeletal hand cradling a single, delicate flower, or an hourglass with sand flowing into an abyss.
-

7. Silnara, The Star-Seer (Goddess of Knowledge, Prophecy, and Fate)



- **Domain:** Knowledge, wisdom, scholarship, prophecy, astronomy, foresight, hidden truths, libraries.
 - **Description:** Silnara is the embodiment of intellect and cosmic understanding. She guides scholars, seers, and all who seek to unravel the mysteries of the universe. Her influence is found in ancient texts, the alignment of stars, and the whispers of destiny. She is impartial in her offering of truth, for knowledge itself is neither good nor evil. Silnara was deeply connected to the **Solarian Dominion** and its pursuit of celestial knowledge. The Sundering shattered many of her grand observatories and scattered her sacred texts. She now inspires the rediscovery of lost lore and warns of impending cosmic threats
 - **Symbol:** An open book overlaid with a starry constellation, or a crystal ball reflecting a distant galaxy.
-

8. Zephyr, The Wandering Wind (God of Travel, Freedom, and Chance)



- **Domain:** Travel, commerce, roads, paths, freedom, luck, chance, wind, wanderlust, trickery (light-hearted).
 - **Description:** Zephyr is the unpredictable spirit of the open road and the joy of discovery. He favors merchants, explorers, and all who seek new horizons. His nature is light-hearted and ever-changing, reminding mortals that sometimes, the best path is the one less traveled, and that fortune favors the bold. He is a patron of honest trade and swift journeys. The Sundering made travel incredibly dangerous, scarring the land and unleashing new monsters. Zephyr's influence now strives to make the paths safer, guiding lost travelers and inspiring the brave to re-establish trade routes and explore the unknown, healing the world through connection. He often opposes fixed dogmas or oppressive regimes.
 - **Symbol:** A stylized compass rose, a feathered wing, or a worn traveler's boot.
-

9. Ignis, The Heart of Fury (God of Fire, Passion, and Destruction)



- **Domain:** Fire, raw passion, destruction, creation (through destruction), revolution, cleansing, sacrifice, rebirth.
 - **Description:** Ignis is the untamed force of fire—a dual-edged deity capable of both devastating destruction and purifying renewal. Ignis represents the transformative power of unbridled emotion and the strength found in decisive, sometimes violent, change. While dangerous, Ignis's flame also provides warmth, light, and the forge's heat. Ignis's essence was profoundly affected by the **Elemental Imbalance** caused by the Sundering. While destructive, Ignis's fires were also crucial in burning away the initial corruption and creating the new landscapes of Aethelgard. Ignis's followers believe that sometimes, the world needs to burn to be reborn.
 - **Symbol:** A stylized flame, a smoldering ember, or a volcanic peak.
-

10. Alda-Terrin, The Stone Mother (Goddess of Earth, Steadfastness, and Community)



- **Domain:** Earth, home, family, community, foundations, nurturing, stability, defense, harvest.
 - **Description:** Terra is the steadfast and nurturing spirit of the earth itself, symbolizing the strength of home, community, and the bonds that tie people together. She is the source of sustenance and the unyielding bulwark against external threats. Her wisdom lies in patience and enduring strength. Terra, like Lyra, suffered immense physical wounds during the Sundering, causing geographical scars and instability. However, her core essence of endurance and nurturing allowed life and communities to slowly regrow. She empowers those who seek to build and protect settlements, providing grounding against the chaos of the world.
 - **Symbol:** A towering mountain, a protective wall, or hands cupped around a sapling.
-

11. Astrea, The Keeper of Balance (Goddess of Justice, Harmony, and Retribution)



- **Domain:** Justice, law (divine), balance, retribution, consequence, truth, oaths, fate (as consequence).
 - **Description:** Astrea is the embodiment of cosmic balance and uncompromising justice. She judges all deeds, ensuring that actions have consequences and that harmony is maintained, even if it requires harsh retribution. She is often depicted blindfolded, symbolizing impartiality, and holding scales and a sword. The Sundering was an act of profound cosmic imbalance. Astrea's power was diminished by the chaos, but she now actively seeks to restore justice to a broken world, ensuring that those who wield corruption face divine consequence. She is seen as the ultimate arbiter against the twisting of reality.
 - **Symbol:** A balanced set of scales, or a single, unwavering sword.
-

12. Aethel, The World-Soul (The Primordial Essence, The Unnamed)



- **Domain:** The fundamental essence of Aethelgard, the underlying magic of creation, the 'spirit' of the world, primordial energy, destiny (world's destiny).
- **Description:** Aethel is not a god in the conventional sense, but rather the collective, sentient spirit of the world itself—a primordial force that existed before the individual gods and certainly before the Sundering. It is the deep hum of life, the collective consciousness of the planet. It doesn't grant spells directly but resonates with all living things.
- **Symbol:** The stylized image of a blooming world-tree, or a swirling nexus of primordial energy.

The Void Gods

There are some that speak of another pantheon. One that has more nefarious purposes. A group of gods that actively work against the Prime Gods and seek to disrupt peace and prosperity. While they don't necessarily work together in the same way, whatever their intentions are, it spells doom for life in Aethelgard. There are no temples to these Void Gods, however, and no one openly worships them.

Races of Aethelgard

The Sundering forever reshaped the races of Aethelgard, scattering ancient empires and forcing new adaptations. While each race retains its core identity, their history, culture, and relationship with magic have been profoundly influenced by the ancient cataclysm.

Most races intermingle in Aethelgard, although this was not always the case. In the first centuries after the Sundering, before cities and kingdoms were rebuilt, the races were mistrusting of each other. This has led to numerous conflicts over the years. Now, however, trade runs across borders eagerly, as everyone knows that everyone benefits. So, most kingdoms and countries have a mixed populace. There are some enclaves, however, that are largely made up of one race, throughout the world. These tend to be mostly elves, dwarves and orcs.

(The pictures below are merely for inspiration. Each race comes in different sizes, colors, etc.)

Humans



- **Average Lifespan:** ~60-80 years
- **Description:** Humans in Aethelgard are renowned for their adaptability, resilience, and ambition. They were one of the dominant powers before the Sundering (the Solarian Dominion) and were devastated by it, but their capacity for rebuilding and establishing new societies, is unparalleled. They tend to be pragmatic, driven by necessity and a desire to reclaim lost knowledge and stability. While individuals can be gifted in any field, human society often emphasizes community, trade, and strong military defense against the lingering threats of the wild.
- **Post-Sundering Impact:** The Sundering instilled in humanity a deep-seated caution towards uncontrolled magic, yet also a fierce determination to understand it and use it responsibly. Their once-grand Solarian Dominion was buried beneath the Whisperwind Wastes, making tales of pre-Sundering human glory seem like distant myths.



Elves

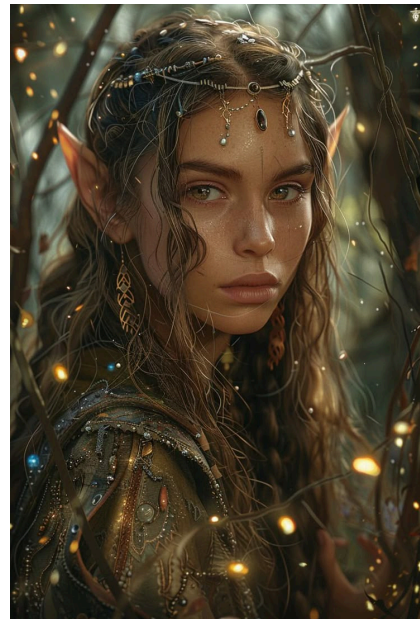


- **Average Lifespan:** ~300-500 years (or longer, though many Elves feel the weight of post-Sundering Aethelgard heavily)

- **Description:** The Eldoria Imperium was perhaps the most powerful and magically attuned civilization before the Sundering, and the cataclysm hit them hardest. Modern elves are a shadow of their former glory, but are typically graceful, wise, and deeply connected to nature and the flow of magic. The Sundering lingers with the elves like a long, painful memory, making them deeply wary of

unchecked magical power. Some are so wary that they have retreated to strictly elven enclaves, where they seek to heal the world and maintain their bond to the earth and the forests.

- **Post-Sundering Impact:** The Sundering decimated elven populations and shattered their living cities. It left them with a profound sense of loss and a deep-seated suspicion of grand magical ambition. Many elven enclaves focus on healing the land and maintaining the delicate balance of nature, viewing the Astral Veil with both fascination and dread. Their innate connection to ley lines and natural magic was warped by the Sundering, making their magic more wild or requiring greater effort.



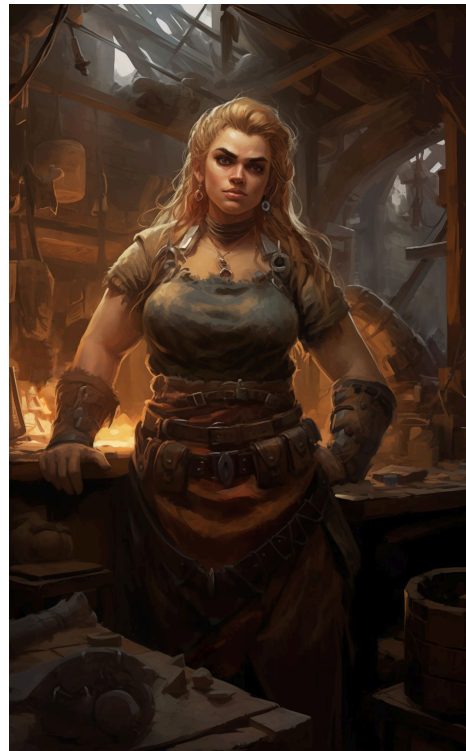
Dwarves



runic and geomantic magic. While their deep-holds were somewhat shielded from the Sundering's direct impact, they suffered immensely from violent tremors and incursions from the depths, sealing away many of their most valuable treasures and knowledge. They live in port cities and mountain hall alike. Some of the greatest destinations include the great halls in the strongholds of dwarven mountain kings

- **Post-Sundering Impact:** The Sundering fractured many dwarven clans and unearthed subterranean horrors that now plague their tunnels. This has made them even more insular and cautious, though their resolve remains unbroken. Their runic magic is still potent but often less about grand feats and more about imbuing objects with protective or enhancing properties. They are often skeptical of wild or uncontained magic.

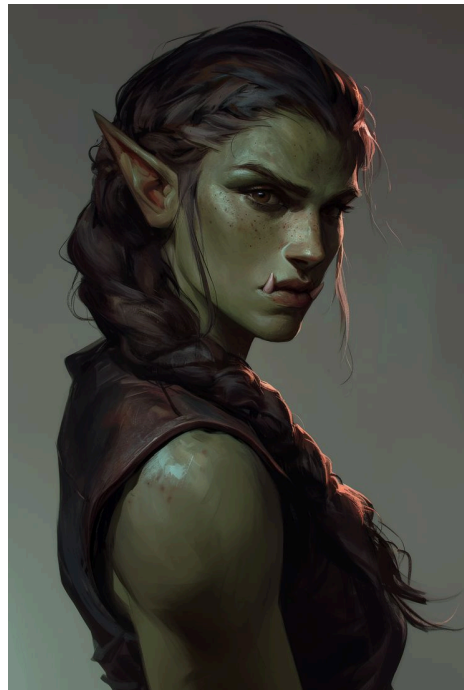
- **Average Lifespan:** ~150-300 years
- **Description:** Dwarves are a stoic, proud, and resilient race, renowned for their master craftsmanship, engineering prowess, and deep connection to the earth. Their society values honor, tradition, and the strength of the clan. Before the Sundering, they commanded powerful



Orcs



- **Average Lifespan:** ~100-150 years
- **Description:** Orcs in Aethelgard are a diverse people. Some live as they have for centuries; nomadic and in tribes and clans. While some tribes are brutish and hostile, others are fiercely communal, valuing strength, loyalty, and practical skills. They often possess a powerful, primal connection to the land and an innate ferocity in combat. The Sundering, while devastating to all, may have inadvertently "freed" some orcish tribes from the dominance of larger empires, allowing them to carve out their own existence. They are great hunters and strong warriors.



- **Post-Sundering Impact:** The orcs were hit hard by the Sundering as it lay their great empire in ruin. Many found themselves in areas heavily affected by the Sundering's raw magic, leading to mutations or a stronger, albeit chaotic, connection to wild energies for some. In the following centuries after the Sundering, the orcs lived in clans, smaller groups that lived together. They are the one race who never quite rebuilt the same way as the humans, elves and dwarves. To this day, some still maintain that the nomadic life with their clan, living off the land is the best way to live. Others long for their long-lost empire.

Halflings



- **Average Lifespan:** ~150-200 years
- **Description:** Halflings are known for their cheerful disposition, resilience, and uncanny luck. They value community, good food, and simple pleasures. While they may seem unassuming, they are surprisingly tough and resourceful, often excelling in professions that require precision, agility, or stealth. They typically prefer to live quiet, peaceful

lives, often avoiding grand conflicts, but are fiercely protective of their homes and friends.

- **Post-Sundering Impact:** Halfling communities, due to their often remote and self-sufficient nature, were somewhat less directly impacted by the immediate chaos of the Sundering than the major empires. However, the subsequent rise of monstrous threats and instability forced them to become more vigilant and cunning. They often rely on their wits and tight-knit communities for survival. Halflings have somehow found a way to always contribute to whatever community they find themselves in. In any city, anyone will know to seek out the halfling tinkerer if they want their grandfather's clock fixed.



Tieflings



- **Average Lifespan:** ~90-120 years
- **Description:** Tieflings are often marked by horns, tails, or unnaturally colored skin. They are a direct consequence of the Planar Contamination that occurred during the Sundering, when the veil between planes tore, allowing chaotic energies and essences from other realms to seep into Aethelgard and subtly influence mortal bloodlines over generations. They are often viewed with suspicion or fear, leading many to develop resilient, self-reliant, and sometimes cynical personalities.

- **Post-Sundering Impact:** Tieflings are a race born from the Sundering's chaos. Their very existence is a testament to the tearing of the Astral Veil. They are often naturally attuned to magic, particularly fire and shadow, but their abilities can sometimes be volatile, reflecting the unpredictable nature of their origins. They are survivors, often relying on their wits and inner strength.



Dragonborn



- **Average Lifespan:** ~100-120 years
- **Description:** Dragonborn are humanoid creatures with draconic ancestry, boasting scales and snouts. Their presence in Aethelgard is also attributed to the Planar Contamination of the Sundering, specifically the influx of draconic (or draconic-aligned) essences from other planes. They are known for their strong sense of honor, pride, and their often fierce loyalty. They typically align with a specific draconic color (e.g., red, blue, green).

- **Post-Sundering Impact:** Dragonborn are a relatively newer race to Aethelgard, emerging in the centuries after the Sundering. Their draconic nature often grants them an innate resistance to certain elemental magics, making them formidable opponents against many Sundered Beasts. They often seek to establish their place in the world through deeds of valor or by protecting the innocent.

